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HIS LIFE AND
LITERARY ACTIVITY



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DOSTOIEVSKY

HIS LIFE AND
LITERARY ACTIVITY

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH BY
EVGENII SOLOVIEV

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY
C. J. HOGARTH

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DOSTOIEVSKY

HIS LIFE AND LITERARY ACTIVITY

I

INTRODUCTION—Dostoievsky and the *littérateurs* of the forties—His peculiarities—The “literary proletariat”—Dostoievsky’s constant poverty and literary bondage—The influence of city life—His urban characters and subjects — Dostoievsky as psychopathologist and psychopath.

THE name of Thedor Mikhailovitch Dostoievsky is usually coupled with those of Tolstoy, Turgenev, and Goncharov, and in any case no one will deny his right to be placed in the front rank of the “Glorious Band” of the forties of the nineteenth century. But, should we compare Dostoievsky with his contemporaries from the point of view of locality, period, and intellectual force, as well as of

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community with Gogol in the matter of "literary descent," we shall encounter great difficulties, and still more so when we pass to the spirit, significance, and form of our author's works. These Dostoievsky owed solely to his personality and the strange circumstances of his private life: beyond question they were peculiar to himself, and reflect, as in a mirror, his sharply defined individuality, morbidly psycho-pathological genius, and originality of thought and fancy—both of which stand apart from, and on a different level from, all else in Russian literature. In fact, few persons will be found to disagree with N. N. Strakhov when he says in a letter to Dostoievsky: "In composition, richness, and variety of ideas you are the leading writer in Russia. Even Tolstoy is, by comparison, monotonous. Moreover, no one could gainsay that your work is tinged with a vivid colouring peculiar to yourself." Wherein, then, does this universally remarked, yet universally intangible, individuality of Dostoievsky's life and literary activity lie? Perhaps a parallel or two

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will help us to return an answer to that question.

In the works of Goncharov and, still more, in those of Turgenev, the first thing which strikes one is the surprising finish of their form. Everything in them is perfectly polished, gilded, and lacquered; every word in them stands in its right place; every phrase in them is not only rounded off, but shaped to a nicety. Not an unnecessary or a redundant detail is present; not a single page displays the least failing or inequality of talent. Particularly is this the case with Turgenev, whose every character, no matter how brief be its appearance on the stage, has the guise of being chiselled of marble, and with a perfection which makes addition to or subtraction from it impossible. In short, the whole would seem to have been conceived and re-conceived, written and re-written, at least a score of times, and, only when that had been done, to have been given to the public at leisure, and in a full assurance that the work would prove a success, and that no preliminary solicitation of favour would be

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needed. Splendid such a manner of working, and fortunate the artist able so to work ! Yet material affluence and self-restraint are necessary for such results : and Dostoievsky possessed neither. During his career he wrote only two works unhastily, and not in a race with time, namely, " Poor Folk," his first novel, and " The Brothers Karamazov," his last. Every other work was the outcome equally of want and of the necessity of coping with want—they were composed during the period when, plunged to the ears in debt, he was sojourning in Siberia or abroad. Hence, with but few exceptions, his works lack the mark of either sustained effort or careful finish. Sometimes a hundred pages will give the reader an impression as of *papier mâché* : then suddenly the author's genius will triumph over his failing energy, and, even as a flash of lightning pierces the clouds and illumines a landscape with a wild, fantastic gleam, so will Dostoievsky's power appear in all its grandeur. Nevertheless we see heaped upon one another thousands of unnecessary details, scores of detached plots, frequent changes of

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subject, and unexpected appearances of new heroes and heroines: the whole jumbled together in a hurried, breathless sequence which testifies at once to strain, to crises in and non-continuity of the creative faculty, to the lightning-like character of Dostoievsky's genius, and to the all-pervading weariness with which he was consumed. This was inevitable, for to save money lay beyond Dostoievsky's power, and not infrequently he sold a manuscript in blank, and allowed the close-fisted publishers to safeguard their interests with various penalties for non-fulfilment of contract. Turn over the pages of Dostoievsky's correspondence and you will see in them one and the same *motif*, namely, "money, money, money." Even the least sympathetic, the least thinking, of mortals will divine the tragedy that was enacted in the soul of the great writer as he bound himself thus to cover vast quantities of paper; for, once fallen into the hands of the firms of Kraevsky and Stellovsky, he wrestled himself free only when his life was drawing to a close. How mighty, then, must have been the talent which

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could put forth the sum of its powers in the face of poverty, of penal servitude, of failing health, and of ever-recurring symptoms, if not of mental eclipse, at all events of that psychopathological trouble which is known as hysteria.

Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Goncharov wrote because they felt within themselves a literary instinct as undeniable, as "organic," as the instinct of other men to eat, to drink, and to sleep. For the trio in question literature was the chief end in life. Yet, had they lacked the requisite talent for writing, they could still have lived very comfortably without it. "I wrote," was their attitude, "because I write, and because I wish to write." An enviable destiny indeed! But in the case of Dostoievsky, his literary activity was as much a necessity as it was a demand. More than once we find him calling himself a "literary proletarian," and doing so with reason, even though his successes and triumphs were won with comparative facility. Immense though was his genius, lack of time marred his work, and distorted it, and wore down his spirit to

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the point that, now in wrath and now in despair, he was moved to exclaim, "Ah, if I could but write a single novel as do the Turgenevs and the Tolstoys!" To think of his mortification, of the many hidden wounds to his self-respect, of his envy and jealousy of more fortunate authors who from birth had been dowered with the material ease which he succeeded in attaining only through the labours of a lifetime! Constantly he had to beg for advances of fees, and for loans of tens or hundreds of roubles; constantly he had to listen to reproaches for lateness in executing contracts; constantly he had to work in defiance of epileptic seizures, and so forth. Truly in full did the great novelist's life express the tragedy of the struggle between genius and the marketplace!

Yet, with it all, Dostoievsky had an absorbing taste for literature, and, apart from literature, sought neither emoluments nor occupation. Proudly he called himself a *littérateur*, albeit a destitute one, and on one occasion actually took offence because it was

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suggested to him that he should seek a Government post or something of the kind. Only when want was pressing upon him more hardly than he could bear would there burst from his lips a few involuntary curses. But even then he stuck stoutly to his guns; and of this a proof may be seen in an extract which is strikingly illustrative of the spiritual tragedy of this "literary proletarian." The extract in question refers to an occasion when Kashpîrev, editor of the journal *Zaria* ("The Dawn"), had failed to send Dostoievsky seventy-five roubles to time. Dostoievsky expresses himself as follows: "Surely Kashpîrev cannot be supposing that it was merely to display my 'beautiful style' that I wrote him concerning my necessities? For how am I to do my work when I am hungry, when, even to procure a couple of thalers for a telegram, I have had to pledge my trousers? The devil take my hunger and myself alike! At the present moment my wife is suckling a child. Is she, then, to go out and pledge her last woollen petticoat? For two days past snow has been falling (if you do not

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believe me, please refer to the newspapers); and if she were to leave the house she might catch her death of cold. Cannot the man understand my shame at having to explain such things? Cannot he understand that, in treating me with contempt after being told of my wife's needs, he is insulting not only me but also *her*? Yes, insulting, insulting, I repeat! Or perhaps he is saying to himself: 'To the devil with Dostoievskiy and his poverty! Let the fellow come and *beg* of me, not *demand*.' " And so forth, and so forth. To think that such words should have been wrung from the author of "Poor Folk," of "Letters from a Dead House," and of "Crime and Punishment"! Also, in his correspondence we encounter many such phrases as "I have been working until my brain is blunted and broken." Yet never for a moment did he put off his literary harness, or even consider the question of doing so.

Next let us leave the subject of Dostoievsky's struggle with commercialism, and pass to another side of the matter. On one occasion

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Strakhov said to Dostoievsky: "By this time a clever Frenchman or a clever German would, with only half your ability, have won fame throughout the two hemispheres, and become a leading light in the cosmopolitan world of literature. The secret is not to put too great a strain upon the creative faculty, but to make your analysis less subtle, and to substitute for your twenty different characters and your hundred different scenes a single character and at most a dozen scenes." This very real failing of Dostoievsky's (for the essence of literary talent is, with the least possible expenditure of expression—using the term in its broadest sense—to produce the greatest possible effect), this very real failing of Dostoievsky's arose partly from lack of leisure, and partly from other causes. As a matter of fact, his talent was a talent peculiar and exclusive to himself: and of that talent the control was an art which he never to the end of his life acquired. So unequal, indeed, so fiery, so irritable, so pre-eminently nervous and capricious, was that talent that even to write an ordinary letter he required inspiration—

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otherwise not two lines of it would have resulted. His themes he selected in slapdash, peremptory fashion, and then, with a wave of his pen, sketched in such complicated types as Ivan Karamazov, Raskolnikov, and Svidrigailov—anything rather than feel his way insensibly and by degrees. That is to say, though a past master in the art of psychological analysis, he was no master of detailed portraiture, for he could not trouble himself to survey and dissect his heroes as did Tolstoy, nor to paint in their lineaments as did Turgenev. Yet in his ability to live with, to suffer with, to fret and to fume with, his characters, he had not his equal. In short, he lacked a single iota of the contemplative faculty; his powers would all be exhausted by the previous labour of creation. Whereas Goncharov viewed life with a marvellously discreet and understanding, yet satisfied, eye, Dostoievsky glanced at it in a state of nerves and tension and torment and repining. Again, whereas Tolstoy stands before you, and probes with his genial gaze the ultimate depths of the human soul, and passes judgment on the just and the unjust

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with the slow deliberation of a genius which is able to sound, and to penetrate to the very heart of, things, Dostoievsky either curses or blesses, hates or loves, but always grows passionate. Hence the fire, the nervousness, the inequality of his talent. Hence the eternal ferment in that breast which could love but with anguish, and hate with the same.

Clearly the prime fault in Dostoievsky was the personal, the inherited *trait* which lay in his tendency to hysteria. We shall see this presently. Also, the fault lay in a circumstance to which A. M. Skabichevsky has pointed with peculiar accuracy and acumen in his "History of Modern Russian Literature." "Whereas," says that critic, "the majority of the *littérateurs* of the forties hailed from the provinces, and belonged to the type of the petty landowner, Dostoievsky represented the plebeian, the governmental service, class, and was a petulantly nervous son of the city. Also, whereas the majority of those *littérateurs* were men of established social status, Dostoievsky alone belonged to the newly arisen class of

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the intellectual proletariat." Thus for this "son of the city," for this "intellectual proletarian," who was for ever engaged in a stubborn, desperate contest with life and the market-place it was impossible to survey characters, to put finishing touches, to design things in detail. Both in its material aspect and as regards its moral problems life troubled him: he shrank with distaste from the beautiful, the elegant, and the delectable—he could bear no artistic accessories, and looked upon life as a thing of terrible gravity, terrible difficulty, terrible rigour. Only occasionally did he kiss and caress—that is to say, include in his scenes any kisses and caresses; for he looked upon existence as a task, a duty, an obligation, a struggle which left one bleeding from the hands and feet. For the same reason do his works contain no enchanting descriptions of Nature, no enthralling love scenes, no bewitching women, no kisses, no tender partings. It was on principle that Dostoievsky put away such things from him; and in "Demons" he makes the writer Karmazinov crack a jest at the expense of

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Turgenev, in that the latter "has such a passion for imagining kisses of a species hitherto unknown to humanity, and for raising around lovers a tangle of broom or other herbage of a kind which only a botanical lexicon could specify, and of which the leaves are tinted to a shade of violet never before seen—not to speak of a tree under which the interesting couple may seat themselves, a tree (hardly need it be said) also tinted, but to a peculiar shade of orange." That this purism of Dostoievsky's came of an over-serious, over-introspective relation to life, in that life appeared to him, beyond all things, a religious problem, is a matter of course. For even as life tortured Dostoievsky's characters, so it tortured Dostoievsky himself, and his outlook upon existence was the outlook of a pessimistic proletarian of the city.

That Dostoievsky was a son of the city is also seen in his choice of subjects. *Baré*¹ Turgenev, Tolstoy, and Goucharov were, first and last, *baré*, and therefore described their natural complement, the peasant, while scarcely

¹ Gentlemen or squires.

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touching upon the third class in the social scale—the citizen, the *miestchanin*,¹ the urban plebeian—save to use it as a foil. On the other hand, Dostoievsky knew practically nothing of polite society, and never introduced it to his stage. Rather, his sphere was the sphere of lesser officialdom, of the *Intelligentsia*, of the urban proletariat. “He loved to introduce the reader to city holes and corners where vice and poverty fester. Like Dickens, he loved to probe their murky poetry. Rejecting portraiture of the beauties of Nature, he constantly unfolds before the reader horrors which make the flesh creep. In particular, he paints St. Petersburg, with its night scenes amid the fogs of autumn and the snows of winter, when those who have a warm roof to cover them sit listening to the howl of the storm without, and the shelterless, the wronged, the lost of every species sit crouching in sorry rags and tatters, amid the mire and the sleet and the cold and the mist—heaped with wet snow, chilled to the bone, plunged in a semi-imbecile delirium.”

¹ Small tradesman or burgher.

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To complete his individuality, Dostoievsky was, beyond all question, a psychopath. By this I mean, not a madman, but a psychopath—a very different thing. That is to say, during childhood he suffered from hallucinations, and, later, from epilepsy, while, in addition, he displayed manifest symptoms both of hysteria and the obsession of distrust. Of the latter affliction the nature is known to every one. It connotes a torturing diffidence of oneself, of one's abilities, and of life; a guarded attitude towards one's fellow-man; a terror of, a shrinking from, the many accidents of existence. As for the hysteria with which we come in constant contact throughout Dostoievsky's biography, he himself has described the malady as only a prince of psychopathologists could do. Turning for details to "The Brothers Karamazov," let us select a passage in which the author personifies the hysterical temperament in the person of the idiot Tchiz. The hysterical temperament, says Dostoievsky, constitutes "an unstable balance of the psychic impulses, an over-facile tendency to emotion, an over-swift interchange of mental phases, an

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abnormally violent reaction of the psychic mechanism. The feature most striking to the beholder in the character of such sufferers is its heterogeneous medley of moods and whims ; of sympathies and antipathies ; of ideas in turn joyous, stern, gloomy, depressed, and philosophical ; of aspirations at first charged with energy, then dying away to nothing. Another feature peculiar to these sufferers is their self-love. They are the most naïve of egoists ; they talk exclusively and persistently and absorbedly of themselves ; they strive always to attract the general attention, to excite the general interest, and to engage every one in conversation concerning their personality, their ailments, and even their vices." It is not difficult to recognize in this character-sketch Thedor Mikhailovitch Dostoievsky, with his unbalanced, unequal nature, his complete lack of mental control, his capriciousness, his swift, gratuitous alternations of triumph and despair, his sympathies and antipathies, his extreme enthusiasm, and his absolute indifference. Terrible the plight of an individual fated to go through life with such a temperament, and

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especially if he happens also to be talented, poor, and as artless as a child ! But this point we will discuss later.

In the meanwhile, a couple of words concerning Dostoievsky's mental outlook. Naturally, the peculiarities of his personal life, coupled with his exclusive and unhealthy temperament, communicated to that outlook a strikingly clear-cut and individual tinge. Yet to attempt to portray that outlook in its entirety would be a vain and Sisyphean task, for no one could possibly discriminate among its contradictory details and mutually exclusive paradoxes. Every passing mood exercised a potent influence upon Dostoievsky's personal ideas, and to him the white of to-day might well figure as the black of to-morrow. For instance, although in "Letters from a Dead House" he asserts that the most characteristic feature of the Russian people is its desire for justice, the fact does not prevent him from stating also in the "Diary" that "the Russian people tends towards suffering." Again, although, at one moment, Bielinsky¹ seems

¹ A "Westernist" writer, and the creator of Russian

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to him a "man of nobility," a little later he is found regarding Bielinsky in the light of an unclean phenomenon of Russian life. And so forth, and so forth. Neither in his life nor in his thoughts was Dostoievsky capable of self-discipline, and he contradicted himself, not only in details, but also in fundamentals. For instance, should you attempt to apprehend his views on pain, he will at one moment seem a pure humanist, and at another a theorist who recognizes pain as the necessary punishment for sin, and at another a devotee of pain for its own sake. Again, while at one moment he asserts that the injustice of life spells destruction to men, at another he declares that it nourishes in them spiritual vigour. Indeed, some of his *dicta* appear merely to have been born of passing gusts of temper, of suddenly aroused emotions, and of accesses of personal sympathy or hostility. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that, had he flourished in a different *milieu*, there would have been

criticism, who believed that the salvation of Russia lay in atheism and socialism rather than in religion. He died in 1847.

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times when he would have spoken in very different fashion, and have refrained from making such startling transitions from Christian humility to the most truculent of Chauvinism. Consequently, the idea of portraying Dostoievsky's mental outlook in its entirety, or in anything approaching inter-harmony, is an impossible idea to realize. In fact, there are times when the undisciplined mind of a great artist like Dostoievsky does not itself know whither it is tending, but, like the mind of Raskolnikov in "Crime and Punishment," calls for a madman's fetters. Yet we can apprehend at least the *general* trend of Dostoievsky's outlook; wherefore, since, in the last chapter of this sketch, I intend to speak of him as a *narodnik* or a cultivator of the people, let us for the moment attempt to characterize his most prevalent mental attitude.

Beyond dispute it lies that, owing to his passionate and impatient personality, Dostoievsky cherished a sort of intermittent, irreconcilable, hysterical grudge against life and against humanity, and that during his clouded

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moments his spiritual wounds became laid open, and life figured in his eyes as a thing barbarous, agonizing, and full of gratuitous, unappeasable cruelty. And at such times the painful curiosity of the artist would lead him also to delve into the human soul, and to find therein a mass of mire and foulness which not all the fires of Hell could cleanse, and, under the influence of the same mood, to discover human nature to be charged with malice and an instinct for giving pain, so that he would cry aloud in his wrath, "Man is naturally a tyrant, and loves to torture." Nay, he would rail at love itself, and impute to it the character of the Inquisition. "To this have I come, that at times I conceive love to be no more than an assumed right on the part of the lover to tyrannize over the beloved." Also, he viewed friendship in a gloomy light. "A terrible thing, that friendship!" he cried. "It would not be too much to say that with ninety men out of a hundred I have made friends only out of rancour." Usually these and similar views of Dostoievsky's are grouped under the one phrase "the asperity

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of genius ” ; yet whether or not they were due to such “ asperity,” or whether they may not have come of the sufferings which he had undergone, it is difficult to say. For my own part, I take my stand upon the latter theory. In Dostoievsky’s rejection of love and friendship, in his representation of life as unnecessarily cruel, in his painfully inquisitorial probing of the bitterness in his soul, in his view of human activity as first and foremost an expiation, I see the burden of a life of anguish pressing with excessive force upon a great writer. Constantly he gave way to despair ; for so greatly did his surroundings and his own character harass and oppress him that at times his soul became charged with a chill horror of, an irrepressible fear of, life. Also, though kind-hearted and affectionate, he was capable of diffusing around him an atmosphere only of dislike. For instance, though passionately attached to his wife, he put her away from him, and descended into the “ Underworld ”—thence to pelt life with his diatribes. At one time he would be possessed with a numbing dread ;

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at another time he would be possessed with an equally numbing despair. Though he yearned to live his life after the manner of a man who is full of health and strength and the *joie de vivre*—the life of a man with love in his heart—such a life had been denied him, and therefore he rejected all comfort, and greeted happiness with a malediction.

Moreover, the very essence of his nature, not to speak of his personal experience and his personal temperament, led Dostoievsky to abjure every species of Epicurism, and even to repel it with loathing. The point of view of the Epicurean, the pursuit of pleasure, the idea that the latter ought to be the ruling *motif* in human activity—all these things were sheerly abhorrent to him. In his youth he felt the attraction of æsthetic ideals, but, in later years, he surpassed all writers in lashing the *Intelligentsia* for its aspirations towards personal happiness, and its attempts to order the life of others according to its own ideal of world-wide felicity. Firmly did he refuse to acknowledge pleasure as the chief, the

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ruling, spring of human action; and once, when drawn into a polemic on the subject, he roundly asserted—though probably only out of a spirit of contradiction—that not only does man seek suffering, but also he loves it, and needs it as much as he does pleasure. Nevertheless, in his more sober moments, our author conceived man's loftiest and most priceless quality to be a capacity for self-sacrifice, a capacity for denying his own *ego* in the name of an absolute morality.

While denying Epicurism, Bentham, Mill, and the Utilitarians, Dostoievsky's views on personality held stoutly to the dogmas of Christian teaching. For him, personality was free—that is to say, gifted with freewill, and, as such, responsible. Moreover, it was fully conscious of that freedom, as could be seen both in repentance and in the desire to undergo suffering after the commission of sin. Even though the sin were general, and not personal, personality was free both to seek and to rejoice in retributive suffering, as the principle which gives release from sin.

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Consequently personality was free, and, for the same reason, responsible. Such the corner-stone of Dostoievsky's outlook upon the world. Moreover, it appears to constitute the only point on which he never once contradicted himself, as well as the point whence flowed all the deductions of his doctrine. Even when introducing psychopaths and madmen to his stage, he never abated his favourite principle, but treated those abnormal characters as strictly as ordinary folk, and demanded of them both responsibility and penalties. Only in one passage—a passage in the "Diary"—is he to be found exchanging wrath for loving-kindness.

Thus Dostoievsky considered that the substance, the value, of the freedom of personality does not depend upon the external, the material, conditions with which it is encompassed. Nor can we deny that, from the point of view of freewill, such a conclusion is perfectly logical. Always the great novelist reiterated that "man cannot live by bread alone"; and any economic or materialistic view of life which asserted that

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man is the reflex of external conditions utterly disgusted him. No matter what the outward setting of the life of the Russian people, more especially of the serf population, might be, there survived in that people, and gleamed from under the rough grey smock and its superincumbent dirt, internal truth. Not by bread alone could man exist, for the essence of life depended, not upon economic or political conditions, but upon moral and religious principles. These the majority of the *Intelligentsia* had sloughed; but not so Russia, the Russian people, which still held fast to inward verity and Orthodox-Christian ideals. Consequently the future belonged to Russia rather than to Europe. Of the moral principle of life, said Dostoievsky, the true basis is love and humility. Without love man can do nothing; and without humility action is a mere serving of one's *ego*, an egoistic seeking of personal happiness. This Dostoievsky flatly declined to accept. Humility and the service of one's fellow-men—here we see our author's ideal. Yet he not only refused to allow, he even denied *in toto*, the

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right of human beings to interfere with their neighbour's life, or to trouble about their neighbour's happiness, or to arrange things according to their own individual programme. Personality—that is to say, the human being in detachment—ought, before all things, to be permeated with the idea that, in essence, such personality is weak and very vile, and that it behoves humanity to devote its whole efforts to self-improvement. Man, the human being, ought, first and foremost, to become good. That done—well, the rest might be left to look after itself. “Humble thyself, proud man; labour, thou man of leisure,” said Dostoievsky in his famous speech on Pushkin.¹ “Leaving thy neighbour in peace, forbear thou to think that thou canst do anything with life, least of all with the life of the people.”

To sum up what has been said, we see that Dostoievsky, while denying Epicurism, Materialism, Socialism, and the rest, saw in life chiefly a moral and religious problem, and in its solution—that is to say, in the

¹ Delivered in 1880, on the occasion of the unveiling of a monument to the poet.

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pursuit of faith in God and of personal self-improvement—the principal task of man on earth. Thus Dostoievsky's view of life was remarkable for its rigour and its own peculiar gloom. To him life was a menacing riddle, and the battle of life so grim that one could not complain if, when the struggle was over, it left one splashed with blood. Not for pleasure's sake did man exist, but for the maintenance of a moral ideal to which man was bound to sacrifice his *ego*. Not love, not roses, not ease, but work and suffering and striving, was the sum of Dostoievsky's adopted principles. No matter that in his compositions he constantly points out the cruelty and the Karamazovian qualities which are latent in all mankind, or that the prevailing feature of his mental outlook was a peculiarly sombre view of existence. Life, he said, was a sacrifice, a renunciation, a duty, a ceaseless fight with temptation. The true life was a contest with the internal, the moral, evil which dwells in every mortal. Finally, suffering was bound to avail in that contest more than was gratification, for the

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reason that, in striving for the latter, we were over-apt to forget our foreordained task or rôle on earth.

From this the reader will perceive that Dostoievsky's purview was a purely religious one. Thinking constantly of the supreme principle which orders life, he not illogically ended by subordinating to that principle both mankind and human happiness, since, like all deeply religious natures, he had a strong leaning towards self-repression, towards a turning of human activity inwards, and back upon itself, in preference to devoting its energies to the struggle with external circumstances. Yet herein we see neither Conservatism nor Reaction nor Indifferentism; for none of these things pleased Dostoievsky. Rather, we see the instinct for self-subordination to some one or something which is common to all natures religious in their bent. Man is not the end of all things—least of all the individual man: for eternally there exists something higher. In the teaching of this supreme principle, and in its constant pursuit, the whole of Dostoievsky's life and activity was spent.

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He believed that if we are to avoid remaining at the mercy of that *ego* which leads to perdition and the level of the beasts, and the victory over which constitutes man's true function, it is necessary for us to have something to which we can make obeisance.

II

Dostoevsky's boyhood—His life in town and in country—
His rural impressions—The peasant Marei—"The
Great and the Holy"—His stern father—His early
family life—His early education—George Sand.

THEodor MIKHAILOVITCH DOSTOIEVSKY was born in Moscow, in the right-hand wing of the Hospital of St. Mary, on October 21, 1821. His father, Mikhail Andreievitch Dostoevsky, served as a surgeon on the staff of the hospital, and came of the class of the *raznotchintsi* or plebeians. Never at any time did he possess means beyond his meagre salary, and his whole life was spent in humble circumstances and the scraping together of the wherewithal to support his numerous family. Dostoevsky's mother resembled her husband, in that, whilst of a religious, strongly domesticated, nature,

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she devoted her energies to no one thing more than to another. In order of birth Thedor Mikhailovitch was the second son, and two years younger than the eldest, Mikhail ; and behind him came several other brothers and sisters. The whole family resided in a tiny official flat of two or three rooms, and at first led the quiet, retired existence requisite for saving against a rainy day—that is to say, an existence which, while it comprised no relaxations such as theatre-going, was yet amicable and free from alarms. Later, however, when the family had come to acquire a small property in the province of Tula, a spice of variety crept into the domestic routine. That is to say, the family took to removing to the country for the summer season ; and this periodical change of scene, added to the new impressions of country life and the freedom conferred by residence on their own domain, resulted in their becoming a little gayer in their habits. But as regards city existence, “ our life flowed on in a narrow, regularly defined, monotonous channel. We rose at six o’clock, and at eight my father

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departed to his surgery, thence, at nine, to proceed upon his round of visits. While he was gone (that is to say, until noon) we children did our lessons, and then had dinner. At four o'clock came tea, and the evening was spent in the parlour, where we read either Karamzin's 'History' or Zhukovsky's poetry—on rarer occasions Pushkin's works. Also, on holiday evenings, we played at *korol*¹; and always during the game little Thedor would be caught cheating, for the reason that he was so frolicsome. Lastly, at nine o'clock, when supper and prayers were over, we children would go to bed." But on Saints' Days this life underwent a slight variation, for on those occasions the children attended both Mass and the previous Vigil. Again, there were times when such diversions as a visit to the theatre or to a booth show would be organized, even though most of the family preferred to stay at home. Such the winter *régime* of the Dostoievskys. The summer, as said, was passed in the country; and the journey thither occupied two or three days.

¹ King—a card game.

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“ During those journeys my brother Thedor would be in a state bordering upon delirium. He would perch himself upon the splash-board of the *britchka*, and, should the vehicle happen to stop anywhere, even for the briefest of halts, he would leap down and scamper around the vicinity, or else walk beside the driver while the latter led the horses.”

In Moscow, at all events, the children were subjected to the sternest repression—more especially by their father, who could not bear to see them at play, but preferred them always to be at work. Clearly his design was to launch the two eldest boys upon a scholastic career. With his strictness went a sort of pedantry which took the form of an invincible conviction that life was so serious, so arduous, a matter that it must be approached with arms in one's hands, and that even from childhood mortals must prepare against every possible calamity and privation, while fashioning for themselves a clear idea of duties and obligations. For the same reason the children were never petted or indulged, but, on the contrary, urged to walk in the rut of a disciplined, discreet mode

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of life which rated the performance of tasks and the absence of aspirations as the two chief ends to be looked to. Naturally the children *did* indulge in pranks—for example, in the sport of conversing with some of the hospital patients through a grating; but this was a forbidden act, and needed to be concealed from the father, who, while stinting himself in everything, in order that he might give his offspring a good, and even a first-rate, education, demanded, in return, the most rigorous deference to his person, and laid a complete embargo upon frivolity. Probably his mistake lay in over-rating the fact that his children were poor plebeians to whom he would never be in a position to offer an easy or a brilliant career; wherefore they would have to win their every step in life for themselves, and, for the same reason, should be trained for the contest from their very cradles. Only thus can we explain the father's grim monotony of routine, his gratuitous pedantry, his over-strict, over-careful bringing up of his family.

But in the country, where the family usually stayed without the head, the children enjoyed

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more freedom. "At our country house," relates Andrei Mikhailovitch Dostoievsky, "we were almost constantly in the open air; and, except when at play, we would spend the whole day in watching and superintending the labours of the field. All the peasantry liked us, but especially so our brother Thedor, whose lively disposition would lead him to bear a hand in everything—to ask to be allowed to lead the horses when harrowing, and to drive them when ploughing. Also he loved entering into conversation with the peasants, who would speak to him freely whenever he did so. But his greatest delight of all was to be entrusted with some task which enabled him to make himself useful. For instance, one day a peasant woman, when going out to reap with her baby, happened to upset her *zhbantchik*¹ of water, so that the poor infant would have nothing to drink. Upon that my brother caught up the *zhbantchik*, ran to the house, and brought thence a fresh canful of water." Indeed, in that rural spot Thedor Mikhailovitch must have enjoyed himself more than he did

¹ Wooden can.

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at any other time in his life, for in the country he lived emancipated from strict tutelage and the necessity of keeping an eye upon his every act. He played "Indians" with his brothers, yet preferred to consort with the peasants, to hunt for mushrooms, and, in general, to "hearken to the voice of Nature." "That little insignificant spot," he said of his country home in later life, "bequeathed to me a strong and a profound impression which will abide with me to the end of my life. Everything connected with the place has for me the dearest of recollections."

During his subsequent term of penal servitude he took an equally great delight in returning to the impressions of his childhood—to "that element of the sacred and the precious without which no man can live." And one such reminiscence has been incarnated by him with such marvellous art that it would be a sin not to reproduce it. "On the second day of that Easter Festival the air was warm, the sky blue, and the sun bright and high in the heavens. Yet all my soul was dark. For two days past the prison had been keeping

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holiday, and the convicts had not gone out to work, and there had been much drunkenness prevalent. Consequently, what with the foul and ugly songs, the games of cards on the floor under the sleeping-board, the thrashings of convicts within an ace of their lives, the constant drawings of knives, and other incidents of the two days' festival, I had grown weary to the point of physical sickness, and could feel rage flaming within my bosom. Presently there passed me the Pole M—tsky, one of the 'politicals.' 'Je hais ces brigands !' he hissed under his breath, and then passed on his way. True, a quarter of an hour earlier I had fled from the *kazarma*¹ like a man demented, but now I hurried back to my place under the barred window, and, flinging myself on my back, clasped my hands behind my head, and closed my eyes. I loved thus to lie, for a sleeping man was never molested, and, meanwhile, I could indulge my thoughts. Gradually I became oblivious of my surroundings, and began to burrow in the storehouse of my memories. At that period I took a

¹ Prison ward or barrack.

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particular delight in recalling my boyhood; and this time, for some reason or another, there came back to me an unheeded episode during the period when I had been nine years old. The day recollected was a day in August, and the scene our country house. Though bright and dry, the air was a trifle breezy and cold, for summer was passing away, and soon we should have to return to Moscow, to spend the winter over wearisome French exercises. How always I hated leaving the country! Walking across to the homestead, I turned aside into the ravine, mounted the ascent to Losk (so we had named the thicket which covered the ravine to the edge of the wood), and, plunging into the bushes, lay listening to the tread of a *muzhik* as he trudged, some thirty paces away, behind the plough. Suddenly amid the profound stillness, and absolutely distinctly, I heard a cry as of 'A wolf! There goes a wolf!' Startled out of my reverie, I shouted aloud with terror, and, running into the open field, made straight for the spot where the peasant was ploughing. He happened to be one of our own peasants, a

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man named Marei, a tall, squarely built fellow of about fifty, with a thick sprinkling of grey on his close-cropped, dark-red beard. I knew him by sight, but had never before had occasion to speak to him. On hearing my cry, he had stopped his horse ; and when, rushing up to him, I seized the shaft of his plough with one hand and the sleeve of his blouse with the other, he stared at me in alarm. ' There goes a 'wolf ! ' I repeated, panting and trembling all over as I clung (probably white in the face) to his smock ; whereupon, with an uneasy smile, and a shake of his head which clearly bespoke concern and anxiety on my account, he 'looked at me and said : ' Go along, you, for being frightened ! There, there, little one ! Come, 'come ! ' And he put out his hand and stroked my cheek. ' Have done, have done,' he repeated, ' and may Christ have you in His charge ! ' My lips were trembling so violently that I could make no reply, nor even cross myself ; and this seemed to make an impression upon him, for once again he extended a massive, black-nailed, earth-en-crusted finger, and gently, very gently, touched

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my quivering lips. And as he did so he smiled, a sort of lingering, motherly smile.

“ So in Siberia, on that day in Eastertide, I bethought me of the poor serf's tender, maternal smile, and of the manner in which he had nodded his head as he murmured: ‘ Surely you are not frightened, little one? ’ And above all things I bethought me of the great soil-stained finger with which, in his gentle, diffident, kindly fashion, he had touched my quivering lips. So I arose from my prison pallet, and gazed around me; and as I did so I remember that I felt as though once more I could bear to look upon my wretched companions, and to do so with a changed eye; for some miracle had suddenly cleansed my heart of all hatred and malice, and, as I walked through the prison and glanced into the faces which I encountered, it struck me that possibly any one of them—even the face of that close-cropped, ruffianly, tipsy-looking, branded peasant who was engaged in bawling out a hoarse, drunken song—might be the face of Marei himself.”

This episode I have adduced (though with

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extensive excisions) for the reason that it seems to me to constitute not merely an episode, but one of those apparently unimportant events which may sink deep into an impressionable boyish mind, and lie dormant under a mass of other thoughts and feelings, and then, suddenly acquiring incredible force from that protracted period of silence, appear upon the scene to determine the grown man's convictions and career. For under the dingy smock of the Russian peasant, under his inveterate barbarity and uncouthness and "beastlike ignorance," Dostoievsky ever sought, and ever found, "great depths of human sentiment," in the shape of the peasant's fine, almost maternal tenderness for whatsoever is weak or unhappy or in pain. These qualities of the peasant he, like Constantine Aksakov, called "the lofty instincts of our people"; and the same qualities led him to believe also in the popular sense of justice which, though at times bruised and besmeared, remains sacred and unchangeable. Not that Dostoievsky's recollections of his boyhood alone can have been responsible for this. All that I mean is that they may have played

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a leading part in the formation of his views. Dostoievsky himself supports the theory. "Without the element of the holy and the precious which is communicated to life by the memories of childhood, man cannot live. Here and there may a man seem never to devote a thought to such recollections; yet all the while he is cherishing them unconsciously. Of all human memories, those of childhood are, in most cases, the strongest, the most potent to influence, which humanity possesses."

And here is another episode—also one relating to Dostoievsky's sympathy with the people, as well as connected with the period of his childhood. "When nine years old," he writes, "I remember the family sitting down to tea around the circular dining-table. The day was the third during the Easter Festival, and the conversation turned on our country house. Suddenly the door opened, and there appeared on the threshold our country steward, Grigory Vasiliev, whose duty it was to look after the property in Tula during his employer's absence. In the country he had been accustomed always to

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wear a German frock-coat and an air of great dignity ; yet here, in Moscow, he was wearing an old smock and a pair of bast shoes ! Moreover, he had come all the way on foot ! He spoke not a word as he entered the room. ' What is the matter ? What can this mean ? ' cried my father in alarm. ' It means,' replied Grigory in his deep voice, ' that your country house has been burnt to the ground.' What followed I will not attempt to describe. My father and mother were hard-working folk of small means ; so that this was a fine gift for them on Easter Day ! Under the first shock of the calamity they conceived their ruin to be complete, and, flinging themselves upon their knees, sought refuge in prayer, while my mother also wept. But suddenly there approached her our servant Alena Frolovna, who, a free domestic (as distinguished from a serf), and a bright, merry-hearted soul of forty-five, had nurtured and tended the whole family, and could tell us such stories as no one else could do. Also, for many years past she had refused to accept any wages, saying that she needed them no

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longer, in that she had managed to save and to bank five hundred roubles against her old age. And now, in this moment of sorrow, she crept to my mother's side, and whispered to her: 'If my money can serve you in any way, take it, for I do not require the little which I possess.' "

At the age of nine the little Dostoievsky may not have fully understood the significance of this proffered sacrifice of five hundred roubles "saved against old age"; but later on, when the episode again rose to the surface of his mind, he used it as a powerful argument in favour of his fundamental point of view. Never did he deny that the Russian populace is rude and ignorant and brutal; yet he knew—or, rather, he believed—that underneath those qualities lies a lofty soul charged with that popular sense of rectitude the corner-stones of which are sympathy with suffering and a power of self-sacrifice. Accordingly, no sooner did it befall him to write of the people than there issued from his pen those episodes of his, boyhood to which we find him returning again and

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again, in demonstration of the nature of "that element of the holy and the precious without which no man can live."

But to resume our theme. The education of the Dostoievsky family was begun upon at a very early age. The mother herself indicated the letters of the alphabet with a ruler, and made the children repeat them after her. Also, visiting tutors were employed, of whom one, a certain Father Deacon, so ably expounded Holy Writ that he produced upon his pupils a considerable impression, even though, as a pedagogue of the Old Faith,¹ he demanded that his charges should be taught their religious exercises according to the *Natchatki*² of the Metropolitan Philaret. The head of the family himself instructed the two elder boys in Latin; and during these periods of instruction (each of which lasted "an hour or more") "we brothers dared not sit down, nor rest our elbows upon the table,

¹ A *Raskolnik* or Dissenter—a member of the sect which declined to accept the revised version of the Church Service Books promulgated by the patriarch Nikon in 1655.

² Rudiments of the Faith.

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but stood like statues as, turn and turn about, we conjugated and declined. These lessons (the appointed time for which was the evening) we greatly dreaded, for the reason that, in spite of his goodness of heart, our father was extremely exacting and impatient, and, above all things, hasty of temper. Even the smallest mistake on our part would cause him to start railing at us." Next, the boys were sent to school at the establishment of a certain pedagogue named Tchermak, who was at least a painstaking preceptor, as well as a man not wholly devoid of a certain fondness for instructing his pupils in the humanities demanded by the scholastic curriculum of the period. In passing, it may be remarked that, as a boy, Thedor Mikhailovitch showed considerable aptitude in acquiring the French tongue, and that, on the festival of his Patron Saint, he used to delight his godfather by reciting to him a number of extracts from Voltaire's "Henriade."

In general, despite the lack of means which forced the whole family to squeeze into two or three rooms during the winter-time,

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Dostoievsky's parents spared^d no money to give their children the best possible education. Unfortunately, that education was eccentric and over-strict in its character. That is to say, up to the age of sixteen or seventeen the youngsters were treated as infants. Never were they allowed to go out of doors alone, always were they made to proceed to school and to return thence with the most pedantic precision, and never were they permitted a single *kopeck* of pocket-money. In short, never were the leading-strings relaxed. Moreover, the youngsters were reared exclusively in the family circle—that is to say, without companions, and in total ignorance of what was going on in the world beyond the walls of the hospital. Hence in later life Thedor Mikhailovitch never felt at his ease in society; albeit a second contributory cause for this uneasiness was his melancholy, wayward, over-serious disposition. In its way, life in constant association with the family is, of course, a beautiful thing; but subsequently Dostoievsky had to pay dearly for the privilege, seeing that it is not given to every one

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to learn, without experience, the art of associating with others, and that that experience Dostoievsky never had. Indeed, more than once he is found regretting his powerlessness to repair the mischief. Exacting both with regard to himself and to others, excessively prone to take offence, irritable, overcharged with *amour propre*, ready to flare up at one moment and to cool rapidly the next, he was little suited for friendship or for *camaraderie*. To no purpose is it that, later, he ascribes his rupture with Bielinsky's circle and the *Contemporary* to a difference of opinion. The real cause of the rupture was simpler by far. It lay in his over-lenient view of himself, and in his over-exacting view of others.

Next let us turn to certain suggestive influences which emanated from his father. In spite of himself, Dostoievsky *père*—a man stern, suspicious, and painfully distrustful, in short, a typical Russian failure (for, however indulgently fortune may treat failures, they remain failures to the end of their lives)—inspired in his children awe rather than affection. An instance of this is seen in those exercises

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in the Latin grammar—exercises during which his pupils stood in constant fear of making even such a trifling blunder as saying *amamant* for *amant*, while every particle of playfulness or boyish spirits had to be suppressed! True, the father never *beat* his children; yet his grim, exacting bearing, his irritable outbreaks, his suspicious, gloomy expression of face, his apparent lack of kindness of heart, all had the moral effect of a rod. Distrustfulness—above all, constant, systematic distrustfulness—has a torturing influence upon children, in that it destroys simplicity, sincerity, and cordiality in the family circle. This may be seen in the agony which it cost Dostoievsky even to write to his father for a remittance of forty roubles. The letter reveals a painfully suspicious son addressing a still more painfully suspicious parent in the full expectation of being accused of drunkenness, extravagance, and debauchery, while in reality he (the son) is needing the money for the barest of necessities. Yet, instead of openly speaking of those necessities, the writer wastes his efforts in calling heaven and earth to

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witness that the father has no reason to suppose him to be a rogue and a cadger. Consequently, this psychopathic, agonized epistle makes truly unpleasant reading; for truly unpleasant is it to see such an over-strained tendency to nervousness manifesting itself in the relations of a seventeen-year-old boy to his father. However, this was how matters stood in Dostoevsky's early days; even though most biographies—probably through reticence—make total omission of the point. Nor did the father stop short at transmitting to his son his own unhealthy distrust of himself, of his fellow-men, and of the world in general: by his subsequent conduct he also strengthened and developed that distrust. Stern less in the sense of cherishing an instinct for equity than of being unconscionably exacting, the elder Dostoevsky never ceased to instil into his children the idea that life is a hard and difficult task wherein even the smallest mistake may eventually spell ruin. Nor need I add to this that, throughout, he held up himself, and his own thoroughness and accuracy, for

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an example to his pupils. Of course, *some* of this may have been of use ; but upon such an impressionable, prematurely disheartened, and ailing¹ lad as Thedor Mikhailovitch such suggestions were bound to exercise solely a harmful effect. From earliest childhood, therefore, Dostoievsky fell into the way of shrinking from life ; from earliest childhood there appeared in him that diffident, suspicious attitude towards himself and others which ended by wrecking his later youth. Properly speaking, he ought to have been treated gently ; he ought to have been soothed rather than frightened, so that his genial, but strangely unbalanced, nature might have remained as it was, and have learnt to face life, not to fear it.

Yet Dostoievsky's boyhood was the happiest period of his existence. For one thing, his father's rigour in those days was mitigated by his mother's caresses ; while, for another thing, the monotony of the Moscow *régime* was periodically broken by the rural impres-

¹ During boyhood Dostoievsky suffered from hallucinations. This has been seen in the episode of the peasant Marei.

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sions of the summer. In short, not actually in the family circle did the grim, harsh difficulties of life arise to confront the boy's sensitive, uneven nature ; for, however stale and monotonous the family system which I have described, at least it contained that element of calm, restful affection to which Dostoevsky felt so strongly and constantly drawn. To picture the great, overcrowded family when it had assembled for tea, with the two lads arguing with their father concerning the comparative merits of Pushkin and Zhukovsky, and backing their arguments with passionate quotations of favourite verses, is not a difficult task. Nor is it difficult to picture the subsequent reading of Karamzin's great work, and the soothing effect communicated by the stately periods of the "History." Nightly the tallow candles that were used for economy's sake would lighten faces now faded into the mists of time ; nightly they would illuminate the features of the father (with their sombre, weary expression), the face of the smiling, good-natured mother, the face of Thedor Mikhailovitch himself (with its small, nervous lineaments and

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shining, enraptured eyes), and the faces of older and younger members of the family. Nay, even the old nurse may have crept into the room to doze in a corner, and momentarily to drop stitches from the stocking at which she would be working as she listened to the inspired phrases.

The member of his family with whom young Thedor Mikhailovitch most associated was his elder brother Mikhail. The pair were nearly of the same age, and therefore played together, did their lessons together, and, as time went on, read together. Of these joint readings—which constituted a sort of preparatory course to Dostoievsky's subsequent literary activity—a word or two may here be said. But first let me refer to another point. That point is this. Certain persons (the late O. T. Miller is an example of them) have assured us that Dostoievsky was an exceedingly erudite man. That he was well read there can be no doubt; but of his erudition, in so far as the term connotes an acquaintance with learning pure and simple, a considerable doubt is justified. For this there is reason.

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Throughout the whole of Dostoievsky's correspondence and compositions you will encounter not a single line which can be taken as evincing even the smallest interest in matters of science. In fact, we may doubt whether he had much knowledge even of the history of the Russian community and people—a circumstance which will at least help to explain certain of his best-known paradoxes. Yet he read extensively, and especially so during the period of his youth. Also it may be added that more irregular reading than his could not possibly be imagined, seeing that it lacked any sort of a system, and that he read anything and everything which came to his hand, but more especially novels and poetry. At ten years of age we find him delighting in Schiller's "Die Räuber"; and to that succeeded Dickens, Sir Walter Scott, George Sand, Shakespeare, Victor Hugo, and others, with, of Russian authors, Karamzin, Zhukovsky, and Pushkin. That Dostoievsky thoroughly understood the writers named, as well as that, subsequently, they proved of the greatest possible utility to him, there can be

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no doubt ; but never did he really *study* them, and therefore never did he become anything but a well-read man. For a great romanticist such humble qualifications might have sufficed ; but for a publicist and an editor of journals they were woefully insufficient. Even psychopathy and psychiatry, as sciences, failed to attract his attention ; and if I have called him a prince of psychopathologists, my reason has lain in his genius rather than in his cultural attainments.

This formless reading—a reading devoid of all historical perspective—developed and humanized Dostoievsky's innate talent ; but likewise it over-enriched the store of a fancy which might otherwise have undergone a partial course of discipline through culture. For of culture Dostoievsky had none, and his heedless, improvident life of the heart and the imagination tortured him to the end, and brought him swiftly to the spiritual crisis with which I will deal in the next chapter. Meanwhile let me give a few details concerning the scope of his reading.

In his earlier days he read with an eager,

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passionate, absorbed interest which prevented him from sleeping at night. Karamzin's "History" he came to know almost by heart, and he had an enthusiastic love also for Pushkin, whom he preferred to Zhukovsky. Later on he applied himself with zest to the works of George Sand, who opened up for him a new world of social problems and relations. For companion in these pursuits he had his brother Mikhail; and from this fraternal community of intellectual interests there sprouted a spirit of close *camaraderie*. As said, George Sand produced a particularly deep impression upon Dostoievsky; and in the following passage he voices that impression with force:—

"The literary appearance of George Sand coincided with the earlier years of my youth; and I am glad that this was so, since at the present time (1876) I can, after thirty years' interval, speak my mind with comparative frankness. In those days I was allowed to read nothing but novels. All else, all works of ideas (especially if they hailed from France), were strictly forbidden me. Never-

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theless, it was not possible to censor *every* source of instruction, for even Metternich could not have kept an eye upon all that our Russian imitators produced: wherefore we found opportunities to skim certain 'dreadful things' (so they were described to us) of the type of Bielinsky's productions, and the like. At the same time, it is but fair to say that, in permitting us French novels, our guardians did us (more especially as regards George Sand) the greatest possible service. Moreover, not since the eighteenth century had come to a close had the censorship succeeded in preventing Russia from receiving tidings of every new intellectual movement which arose in Europe: nor had those tidings been tardy in spreading from the highest ranks of the *Intelligentsia* to the lower, and thence to the thinking, interested masses. The same remark applies to the European movement of the thirties; and we brothers quickly became conversant with that tendency among the *littérateurs* of the Continent, and familiar with the names of its newly arisen orators, historians, tribunes, and professors, and *au*

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courant (more or less) with the *direction* of that tendency. It manifested itself with especial force in the realm of the novel in general and of the novels of George Sand in particular. True, even before her works had appeared in the Russian tongue—even before our ladies had taken alarm at her wearing breeches, and had therefore done all they could to make our flesh creep, and to render her ridiculous—Senkovsky and Bulgarin had introduced this authoress to the Russian public. True, also, Senkovsky himself (though, later, he executed the translation of her works) had called her (in his journal *Books to Read*) ‘Mademoiselle *Egor* ‘Sand,’ and had seemed to approve of his own witticism; while in ‘48 Bulgarin had printed concerning her (in *The Northern Bee*) both that she indulged in nightly drinking bouts with Pierre Leroux and that she was accustomed to take part in ‘Athenian’ *soirées* at the French Ministry of the Interior, in company with that rascal of

‘ The Russian equivalent of the *masculine* name George. In the above passage, also, the Russianized form of the name Sand is given the *masculine* declension.

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a Minister, Ledru-Rollin (I myself had read the passage, and can remember it well). But by the time of which I am speaking ('48) George Sand had become known to the whole of our reading public, and no one any longer believed Bulgarin's statements. I was sixteen years old when I first read one of her earliest and most charming productions, and spent the following night in feverishly pondering it. True, she was not a great thinker, but at least she was one of the brightest prophets (to express myself in somewhat florid fashion) of the happier future which awaits mankind. Ever she held stoutly and gloriously and consistently to her ideals; and the reason for this lay in the fact that she possessed a soul capable of *formulating* ideals. For nearly always does an immutable clinging to a creed constitute the distinguishing characteristic of lofty spirits who genuinely love their species; and as regards Sand in particular, she based her convictions, her hopes, and her ideals upon the moral sense of man—upon his spiritual hunger, upon his yearning for perfection and purity—rather than upon any theory of ant-

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like compulsion. In other words, she cherished an unconditional belief in the human personality, to the point of its being immortal, and ever upheld and diffused her theory of personal freedom."

Since, therefore, George Sand believed in the future of mankind and its coming happiness, her novels constituted for Dostoievsky, as they have done for many another, a magnificent school of democratic thought.

III

The death of Dostoievsky's mother, and his removal to St. Petersburg—A ray of idealism—Injurious impressions
The Engineering School—Dostoievsky's loneliness—His joyless youth—"Poor Folk"—His rupture with Bielnsky—His failures—His illness.

FOR the majority of people early manhood or womanhood represents the happiest time of their lives. This is because at that period one believes in oneself and one's capabilities and one's health and one's future ; and such a belief tinges each petty event with a rosy hue, and causes one, with the egotism peculiar to one's years, to construe each event to one's own peculiar advantage. For over all rules the conviction—rather, the inclination to suppose—that the world is contemplating one with approval and wishing one the best of good fortune ; that, in general, one's *ego* is bulk-ing large in the world, and is destined to

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accomplish feats of especial magnitude, and to be dowered by life with an especial meed of blessings and indulgences. This attitude comes, of course, of sheer *naïveté* and self-confidence and buoyancy and high spirits ; yet also it is an attitude proper to most young people. With Dostoievsky, however, whose letters and thoughts during his callow years were letters and thoughts from the "Underworld," the exact reverse was the case. Indeed, his prevailing characteristics were melancholy ; a suspicious treatment of life ; a torturing self-distrust ; an occasional tendency to "terroristic" outbursts of jejune self-confidence ; an unhealthy, boundless imagination which brooked neither discipline nor restraint ; an insanely lavish life of the heart alone ; a peculiarly inverted conceit which, while ever seeking activity and glorification, invariably turned back in faintness of soul, and preferred to remain seated in a corner ; a sort of mortally wounded, mortally offended, pride which led him everywhere, and in every word and act, to detect chicanery and insincerity ; lastly, an insatiable petulance in his relations

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with his fellow-men. At length these factors culminated in a terrible mental crisis, and in a catastrophe unique among the accidents of life. Of that crisis let us pass to the facts.

Early in the year 1837 Dostoievsky's mother died, and the father decided to send his sons to the School of Engineering in St. Petersburg. "It was the month of May," relates Thedor Mikhailovitch, "when we set out, almost at a foot's pace, and with halts of two or three hours at every posthouse on the road. Never shall I forget the tedium of that journey, which lasted for nearly a week. Yet, though I and my brother were bound for an entirely new life, we found ourselves relapsing into momentary dreams of 'The Elevated and the Beautiful' (which, like the numbers—oh, what numbers!—of similar phrases then current, was a phrase used in good faith and good heart). We ourselves cherished passionate beliefs, and, though we knew all that was awaiting us in the coming mathematical examination, our heads were filled, rather, with poets and poetry. Indeed,

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on the way my brother himself indited some verses—two or three stanzas of them daily ; and I occupied myself with the mental composition of a romance of Venetian life.” This gleam of a youthful idealism is truly pleasing, even though so soon (though, happily, only for a time) it was to become buried beneath a mass of other, and grosser and more shameful, impressions. *A propos*, although it has now become the catchword to call Dostoievsky a Conservative, if not a Reactionary, it would be interesting to know what there lies in common between Conservatism and Dostoievsky’s idealistic, whole-hearted belief in the future. But that by the way. Let us return to our story.

Eventual entry to the School of Engineering fell to the lot of Thedor Mikhailovitch alone, for his brother met with rejection at the hands of the doctors. This first mischance exercised upon Dostoievsky a bad effect, in that it led both to his becoming parted from his only friend in life and to his spending several years in virtual isolation. That is to say, he failed to get on with his

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new comrades, and, says M. Saveliev, in writing of this period: "From the authorities and the elder pupils he held aloof; and even during his term in the senior class he was generally to be seen alone—whether working at his desk or pacing the classrooms with head bent and his hands clasped behind his back." The truth is that, though the customs of the school admitted of the seniors lording it over the juniors, as well as of their indulging in brawls and dissipation, these things were by no means to Dostoievsky's taste; while, *vice versâ*, he produced upon his companions the impression of being a mystic and an idealist, in that, either being or supposing himself to be unhappy (with Dostoievsky the two states were not always distinguishable from one another), he preferred to take as his favourite occupation long walks with nothing but his thoughts for company. He worked diligently at his studies, but he worked at them without enthusiasm; whilst from dissipation he turned away with absolute loathing. Nor had the antiquated drill and military etiquette of the place—a

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rough, but honest, *régime*—any attractions for him. Rather, his unhealthy *amour propre*, combined with his mental sensitiveness and his physical delicacy, prompted him to seek isolation. In short, if we are to believe his letters of the period, his then mental condition was truly a grievous one, in that, whilst money difficulties rendered him extremely irritable, he had to work at tasks which he did not like, and to have as companions men with whom he possessed not a single point in common. In a letter to his brother he says: “I wonder whether my boding thoughts will ever become more restful”; and in another passage he writes: “I am beginning to think that soon I shall lose my senses. To live without hope is a terrible thing. Gazing ahead, I feel appalled at the prospect, and move as amid a chill, arctic atmosphere which the sun’s rays never penetrate. Not for many a day past have I known a particle of emotion, but long have felt as did the Prisoner of Chillon after the death of his companions in durance. Also, the bird of paradise, the bird of poetry, no longer comes

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to warm my frozen soul. Perhaps you will say that this is mere fancy on my part? Then let me assure you that all my old dreams are fled, that all those splendid arabesques which I used to create have shed their gold, that all the thoughts which used to cheer my brain and spirit stand stripped of their heat and glory, that my heart is turned to veritable dust. More I fear to say. I should fear so to do even had the past been a golden dream, a series of flowery fancies."

These phrases may contain much rhetoric and "romancing" (for Dostoievsky conceived that every one had a right so to "romance"); but, even supposing that a tenth part of them are true, they connote a terrible plight for a youth of seventeen! Loneliness, lack of money, soreness of soul—verily he had ground for his mental condition! And with it all went an inherited, temperamental melancholy; while his painful distrust of himself and of his companions converted life into one long torture. These inward sufferings and repinings we shall be better able to appraise from the

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letter in which he requests his father to send him forty roubles. I will quote it in full :—

“ MY DEAR GOOD FATHER,—

“ Surely you do not think that, in asking of you pecuniary help, your son is asking of you too much? As God is my witness, I have no wish to cause you any loss, whether through my extraordinary expenditure, or through my ordinary. For I know how bitter is the burden of debt under which my family is labouring. Indeed, were I free, were I my own master, I who have a head and a pair of hands would not trouble you for a *kopeck*, but would make shift to deal with my pressing necessities, and shrink with shame from seeking your assistance. But let me set before you in detail my immediate requirements, so that you may see for yourself how pressing they are.

“ First of all, dearest Papenka, I beg of you to remember that I am, in the fullest sense of the term, *in service*. That is to say, whether willing or unwilling, I am forced to conform to the rules of the establishment wherein my

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lot is cast. For how could I make of myself an exception, seeing that nothing but unpleasantness awaits those who try so to do? You yourself have lived in the world, and therefore will not fail to comprehend what I mean. However, the camping contribution of each pupil in a military-educational establishment amounts to forty roubles (I would not trouble you with such details were you not my own father); nor in that sum am I including such necessities as, for example, the cost of tea and sugar—items indispensable not so much for cutting a figure as for eking out one's existence. For when one is sitting, soaked with rain, in a tent, or when one returns to College in a state of hunger and weariness, one might well fall ill if one had no tea to drink (last year that actually happened to me during a time when we were on the march). Yet I respect your difficulties so much that I have determined to do *without* tea, and only to ask of you the money for two pairs of rough boots at sixteen roubles apiece. Also, my effects—my books, my boots, my paper, my pens, and so forth—need to repose some-

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where, and for that purpose I require a chest, since we are not provided with camp furniture beyond the tents themselves and some straw-stuffed mattresses. In fact, I am constantly being asked why I have no chest for the storing of my effects, even though the Government does not really care whether I possess one, nor whether I have a place to store it in. True, I have passed my examinations, and therefore do not actually *require* the books ; also, the Government clothes me, and therefore I do not actually *require* the boots : but how am I to spend my time with not a single book to read, and what am I to do for boots, seeing that even three pairs of Government boots will not last one half a year in St. Petersburg? Moreover, as I have said, the Government allows us no storage room for the chests which we are obliged to have ; and since already I take up more than my share of space in the tent, and am thereby inconveniencing my comrades, I should not be allowed to keep the chest in the tent (in fact, *no one* does so), but should be forced, for a consideration, to obtain storage room with one

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of our soldier servants. My comrades adopt this plan, and therefore to the cost (one rouble) of the purchase of the chest there would have to be added two roubles for its storage, and five roubles for its carriage to and fro. Also, I have to pay five roubles to my soldier servant for cleaning my boots. These are the regular charges."

It was from such a prosaic soil of poverty and isolation that in early manhood there sprouted Dostoievsky's passionate, rancorous view of the world.

"Life," says he in another passage, "is utterly repellent to me. All the good that I can see in it is the element which stands furthest removed from it and earthly happiness. I refer, of course, to the spiritual element. The one real faculty which has been vouchsafed to man is the ability to combine in his soul the atmospheres of heaven and of earth: wherefore the fact that man is Nature's child constitutes a contradiction—in it we see Nature's own laws infringed. For my own part, I believe the world to be a place of purgatory

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for such celestial spirits as have allowed themselves to become overshadowed with thoughts of evil ; and for the same reason I believe the world to have taken on a purely negative significance—to have become, from constituting a lofty, transcendental, spiritual entity, a mere satire. Yet, through the very fact that I believe the world to represent the rude envelope within which creation languishes, I know that only an effort of will will be sufficient to break it, and to permit one to mingle with the Eternal. Yet how faint-hearted is man ! Oh, Hamlet, Hamlet ! ”

Thus we see a hint of suicide. Workaday life, said Dostoievsky, is but a sorry tale of sin. Therefore, if we are to establish lofty, transcendental spirituality, life must be abjured. Of the flesh, of striving for earthly happiness, come but dark and sinful thoughts ; whereas of suffering and of asceticism comes purification of the soul. An example of Dostoievsky's leanings is seen in the fact that he felt greatly attracted towards a fellow-pupil named Shidlovsky. Why did Dostoievsky like this youth ? Because, “ with his wasted, sunken cheeks, and

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his great eyes dry, yet full of fire, Shidlovsky is looked upon as a martyr. And with that physical decline goes a marked and eminently spiritual beauty of feature ; for he has suffered, oh ! so terribly ! It seems that once he loved a maiden, and she married another man. Yet, without that love, could Shidlovsky have become the pure, the lofty, the selfless high priest of poetry that he is ? ” Here we see, certainly not philosophy, but the early germ of Dostoievsky’s semi-mystical, semi-fantastic addiction to paradox.

In 1839 his father died, and in 1843 Thedor Mikhailovitch, his full course of studies completed, made his entry into the Service proper. “ On leaving college, Dostoievsky embarked upon a Bohemian, bachelor life which was full of privations, seeing that (it need hardly be said) his pecuniary embarrassments continued as numerous as before. True, if we include in our estimate of his income his official salary and sundry remittances from his guardian, he received a sum of about five thousand roubles a year ; but he was eminently unpractical, and money slipped through his fingers with in-

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credible rapidity." For one thing, Dostoievsky maintained a flat at a rental of a hundred roubles a month; and, for another thing, it did not lie within him to exercise self-denial. The result was that he squandered his means upon trivialities—that his expenditure remained, throughout, the expenditure of a man of obsessions and whims. In addition, he had a passion for billiards (later, for roulette); and at that too, of course, he lost. Yet, though his standing lack of funds worried him extremely, he had neither the will nor the power to amend his ways; and while expenditure upon vanities occupied the first place in his budget, and he realized the folly of such a course, he continued in his ways unchecked. Indeed, not infrequently we see him as delighted as a child over the fact that he is able to "throw money about"; and almost it would seem as though in doing so he saw a manifestation, a proof, of power. Eventually—that is to say, by the time that he came to leave the Service (which he did in 1844, for the reason that he could bear the monotony of the life no longer)—his paucity

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of funds had merged into chronic impecuniosity.

In fact, to the end of his life Dostoievsky remained a squanderer of money. Never (save, perhaps, in his later days—and then only owing to the exertions of his wife) did he learn to make both ends meet. Though clever in the highest degree, and well aware of the fact that his constant indebtedness and the system of eternal advances of fees had the effect of shackling him, of subjecting him to endless humiliations, and of rendering him the slave of the literary market, he continued to live as though life were a thing of a day. Extravagance is a grave failing, even from the point of view of purism and of virtue; but from the other, the scientific, point of view it is an absolute disease. For who and what is a spendthrift? In the first place, he is a man of weak will; and, in the second place, he is a man possessed both of an invincible instinct for acquisition and of a number of whims and caprices which at any moment may fire his brain, and obsess his consciousness, with their ever-insistent demand for satisfac-

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tion. Herein we see vanity, and herein we see also sensuality; but the root cause of the evil lies in an unconquerable inability to control the passing fancy—in such a total absence of self-discipline that even the briefest deferment becomes a torture. “Against my addiction to making purchases I could make no headway,” says a psychopath in Sm^l. Kühler’s “Psychopaths of the Present Age” (p. 93). “I could not break myself of it, and, though it brought me to the verge of despair, I continued helpless in the matter.” In similar fashion did Dostoievsky give way to despair. Indeed, he lived in a constant fit of it, yet could not check himself, nor prevent his perpetual lack of means from becoming also his perpetual torment. True, whenever he had a little money in his pocket, he would brighten and feel easier in mind; yet the very next moment he would be hastening to disburse what had come into his hands. Again, although, like all men, he yearned for freedom and independence, for the position of being his own master, he spent his whole life in fettering his personality. The morrow, the

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threat of poverty, weighed upon his mind from day to day ; yet never did he adopt, nor could he ever have adopted, measures to repel the menace. In "The Gambler"—a weak production, generally speaking, but very characteristic of its author—he has graphically portrayed the mental condition of a man who altogether lacks the power of self-control, the power to resist any momentary impulse which arises in his soul. Of course, such a temperament is one of a diseased type ; yet a consideration which scarcely needs to be pointed out is the following. Dostoievsky suffered greatly from want of self-confidence. May not, therefore, these spendings, this squandering, of money have afforded him a sort of phantom, fleeting sense of power ? May he not have said to himself : " If I am able to throw away one coin, I am able to throw away hundreds ; consequently I am neither a pariah nor a pauper " ? Poverty, the necessity of " self-diminution," the necessity of fitting one's personality into a restricted frame of life—that he feared more than he did aught else, for the reason that in life he strained ever

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towards the exclusive, the particular, while the ordinary only frightened him, and evoked in him repulsion. Moreover, in his composition lurked a larger element of vanity than should have been the case.

On abandoning the Public Service, Dostoievsky took to literature, and adhered thereto for the rest of his life. At the manner in which, from the first moment of his setting foot in this new and unfamiliar field, he began to dart from one quarter of it to another, under the influence of his impatient and absolutely unbridled temper, it is impossible not to marvel. Every moment different projects would arise in his brain, and at first sight seem to him brilliant and alluring ; but presently, on finding that life's difficulties continued to present themselves, he would cool in his enthusiasm as quickly as he had taken fire. In the beginning he tried his hand at translations, and eagerly invited the co-operation of his brother Mikhail. The first thing in this connection which engaged his attention was an unfinished novel (as regards the Russian translation) entitled " Matilda." This

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Dostoievsky decided should be completed, and the novel published ; and in raptures over the scheme he writes to his brother : " The novel ought to sell well, and Nikitenko predicts for it a great success, since interest in it is rising higher and higher, and the sale of three hundred copies alone would cover the cost of printing. Thereafter, should we publish the work in eight parts at a rouble apiece, we should stand to make a profit of at least seven thousand roubles. Write at once whether or not you agree." Next came a plan of translating Schiller ; and once again Dostoievsky's letters to his brother show enthusiasm over the project. Yet hardly need it be said that neither " Matilda " nor Schiller's works saw the light. To the same period, however, belongs Dostoievsky's first independent work, " Poor Folk." That is to say, he sat down to complete what he had begun at the School of Engineering. Except for " The Brothers Karamazov," " Poor Folk " constitutes the only production which its author not only elaborated assiduously, but also re-wrote more than once. " I finished it," he says in a letter to his

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brother (of date 1845), "last November; but in December I decided to do it over again, and re-wrote and re-fashioned it, and in February gave it another course of pruning, polishing, interpolating, and deleting. Only by the middle of March was the whole completed to my satisfaction." Always he disliked being hurried. "I have sworn," again he writes, "that, come what may, I will make a stand against having to work hastily, or to term. Writing to term has the effect of stifling and ruining everything. I want my productions to be good, to be finished. Look at Pushkin, look at Gogol. They have written little, yet for both of them monuments are waiting. At present Gogol receives a thousand roubles a page, and Pushkin once sold a single verse for a *tchervonetz*." ¹ Nevertheless Dostoievsky's satisfaction with his novel was whole-hearted, save for the dilemma as to where it was to be "placed." His desire was to submit it to *Notes of the Fatherland*; but eventually he decided that "in that office lie heaps

¹ A gold ducat.

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of manuscripts which never even obtain a reading." True, should the novel succeed, "its literary future, its life," would be assured; but, though his story was "a stern and a serious thing," what if it should not be accepted? Thus we find him writing: "It will never get placed; and, that being so, might it not be better to throw it into the Neva? For what am I to do with it? I have thought of every conceivable plan, yet am at a loss. In any case, never should I survive the death of my *idée fixe*." Things turned out better than he had expected. "It was in the May of 1845. Early during the previous winter I had suddenly started work upon my first story, 'Poor Folk,' although previously I had written nothing; and when the story had attained completion I found myself nonplussed as to what to do with it, or to whom to entrust it, seeing that, save for D. V. Grigorovitch, who himself had written nothing save a short magazine article entitled 'The Organ Grinders of St. Petersburg,' I possessed not a single literary acquaintance. However, one day Grigoro-

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vitch came to me and said: 'Give me that manuscript of yours' (he had not read it). 'Next year Nekrasov is intending to start a review, and I will show him your story.' To Grigorovitch, therefore, I handed the manuscript; and, later on, I met Nekrasov, and shook hands with him. Yet so overcome was I with consciousness of myself and my production that presently I turned tail after exchanging only the briefest of words with my host. My hopes of success were now almost *nil*, and, moreover, I stood in the greatest awe of the 'Notes of the Fatherland Faction' (so, in those days, Bielinsky and his set were called); and though I had more than once read Bielinsky, and with pleasure, he had always seemed to me a severe and menacing figure, and I had thought to myself: 'He would only laugh at my "Poor Folk."' True, there had also been times when I had reflected: 'This story of mine—I have written it with zest, and almost with tears in my eyes. Surely, then, the many hours which I have spent with a pen in my hand have not been all a lie, all a mirage, all a period of insincere feeling?'

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Yes, often had such thoughts been mine : and just as often had doubts returned to me. Well, on the evening of the day when I had handed in my manuscript I went for a long walk, and took occasion to visit an old college friend of mine ; and with him I spent the greater part of the night in discussing ' Dead Souls ' (how often we had previously discussed the book I do not remember). At length, at four o'clock, I walked homeward through the pale, almost daylight-clear night of St. Petersburg. The weather was fine and warm, and when I entered my flat I felt that I could not go to bed, but must open a window and sit looking out of it. Presently a ring at the door-bell startled me. It was Grigorovitch and Nekrasov ! Rushing into the room in transports, and almost in tears, they embraced me again and yet again. It seemed that, on the previous evening, they had returned home early, and started to read my manuscript, thinking to themselves, ' The first ten pages will show us what it is good for,' and that, when those ten pages had been read, they had decided to read yet another

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ten, and that, in the end, they had sat up all night over the book, taking turns to read the manuscript aloud, according as one or the other of the pair had grown weary. Later, when Grigorovitch and I happened to be alone, he said to me: 'While Nekrasov was reading aloud the episode of the student's death I heard his voice falter. Then, when he came to the passage where the student's aged father pursues the bier, I heard his voice falter a second time. And at length he could contain himself no longer, but, striking the manuscript with his open hand, cried, "What a writer the fellow is!" Yes, to *you*, you understand, he was referring. So we spent the rest of the night as you know.' In other words, as soon as the pair had finished the manuscript (there were seven folios of the thing), they had decided to go and seek me out. 'Never mind if he is asleep,' they had said to one another. 'Let us awake him, for this thing transcends sleep.' And often subsequent reflection has led me to wonder at the incident; for Nekrasov's character is, beyond all things, guarded, non-communicative, reserved, almost

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diffident. At least, so it has always seemed to me. Consequently such a sequel to our first meeting meant an exceptional manifestation of feeling on his part. Fully half an hour did he and Grigorovitch remain with me ; and during that half-hour we talked of God only knows what, but comprehending one another with half a word, and eagerly, excitedly speaking of poetry, of truth, of 'the then position of affairs,' of (need I say?) Gogol (with quotations from 'The Revisor' and 'Dead Souls'), and, still more, of Bielinsky. 'I intend to take Bielinsky your manuscript to-day,' said Nekrasov triumphantly as he laid his hands upon my shoulders and shook me. 'That done, we shall see what we *shall* see. What a man you are, to be sure ! You and he must make one another's acquaintance, for he is a truly splendid fellow. Now we must be off. Do you go to bed until to-morrow, and then come and see us.' But sleep I could not, so possessed was I with rapture and the sense of success. How glorious was that feeling ! How well I remember thinking : 'Let a man

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but succeed, and what adulation and greetings and congratulations become his ! For instance, to think of those two coming to arouse me at four o'clock in the morning, and almost shedding tears, and exclaiming that it was a matter which transcended sleep ! How splendid ! ' Yes, such were my thoughts. What a vision I had that night ! ' "

Thereafter Dostoievsky simply reeked of glory, and, in his hysterical enthusiasm, even exaggerated his success. " Dear brother," he writes in 1846, " never should I have imagined that my reputation would have reached its present apogee. Everywhere I meet with unbounded respect, and the interest in my doings is extraordinary. Also, I have made the acquaintance of a multitude of the best people. Prince Odoievsky has begged me to favour him with a visit, and Count Sologub is said to have torn his hair out with rage and envy when Panaev explained to him that a genius had arisen who would one day trample all such as him under foot. Sologub began asking every one about me, and, in particular, went to Kraevsky with the inquiry: ' Who is this

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Dostoievsky? Where is he to be found?' To which Kraevsky, who never whispers in people's ears, but says exactly what he has in his mind, replied that 'it is unlikely that Dostoievsky would care to honour a man like *you* with a visit.' In short, every one looks upon me as a marvel, and I cannot open my mouth without hearing folk repeating in every corner, 'Dostoievsky has said this,' or 'Dostoievsky desires to do that.' In particular has Bielinsky the greatest possible affection for me, and Turgenev's liking too is immense."

After reading "Poor Folk," Bielinsky said to Nekrasov: "Bring me this Dostoievsky. Bring him to me at once." And when the young writer appeared the great critic regarded him for a moment or two with a grave, reserved glance, and then burst out with flashing eyes: "Do you realize what you have written? Only with the instinct of a true artist could you have described all that you have done. To think that of your inner consciousness you have contrived to present the marvellous verisimilitude which here we see! To

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think that at the age of twenty you have been able to envisage things so well ! For in this unfortunate *tchinovnik* of yours we see a man so inured to servitude, a man reduced to such a pass, that in his abasement he does not dare to think himself unhappy—he considers the very least shadow of repining to savour of ‘free thought.’ Oh, terrible, terrible ! What a tragedy ! Yet you have delved to the very essence of things, and at a stroke have revealed a great truth. Value your gift, I beg of you, and remain ever true to it. Thus will you become a great writer.”

Evidently Bielsky saw in the idea of “ Poor Folk ” a corroboration of his favourite theory that abnormal social conditions distort and shatter and nullify and dehumanize mankind to the point of causing the latter to lose its human form and semblance. Moreover, Dostoevsky’s talent and Dostoevsky’s personality alike met with his approval ; and to that enthusiasm Dostoevsky responded in full measure. In fact, on leaving Bielsky’s presence, he halted at the corner of the street,

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and, raising his eyes to the sunlit zenith, reflected shamefacedly, "Am I really so great as they say?" To which succeeded the timidly rapturous thought: "But I must strive to show that I am worthy of their praises; I must strive, through humble labour, to become as glorious as they; I must remain ever true to my gift, even though I comprise in myself much triviality, and am compounded (did Bielinsky but know it) of trashy, sordid elements. *Littérateurs*, they say, are proud and vain; and so, very possibly, they are; but in all Russia they alone hold fast to that truth which, with justice and virtue, will ever prevail over vice and wrongdoing. Yes, *we* shall prevail. Oh, to become one with, to become one of, those men!"

Thus did Dostoevsky find his inevitable *milieu* amid a literary circle composed of the best men of the period. Yet not for long did he remain there. Why so? Though the question is a difficult one to answer, it is one which cannot be overlooked. The following is what Madame Panaev-Golovachev's memoirs

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have to say concerning this portion of Dostoievsky's career:—

“The first time that Dostoievsky came to see us he came with Nekrasov and Grigorovitch—the latter of whom had just entered the literary field. At the first glance one could perceive that the new-comer was a young man of an extremely nervous and impressionable temperament. Short and thin, he had fair hair, an unhealthy complexion, small grey eyes which wandered uneasily from object to object, and pale lips which maintained a restless twitching. Almost every one present was known to him, yet he seemed bashful, and took no part in the general conversation, even though successive members of the company tried to draw him out, to banish his reserve, and to make him feel that he was a member of our circle. After that evening, however, he came frequently to see us, and his restraint began to wear off: he even took to evincing a certain impetuosity—to engaging in disputes in which sheer contradictoriness seemed to impel him to give every one the lie. The truth was that his youthfulness combined with

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his nervous temperament to deprive him of all self-control, and to lead him to over-parade his presumption and conceit as a writer. That is to say, dazed with his sudden and brilliant entry into the literary arena, and overwhelmed with the praises of the great ones in the world of letters, he, like most over-impressionable spirits, could not conceal his triumph over young *littérateurs* whose entry had been of a more modest order. But the presence of such novices in the circle was bound to end in trouble, and Dostoievsky seemed purposely to prepare the way for it, seeing that, through his captiousness and his tone of overweening pride, he showed that he considered himself to be immeasurably superior to his companions. Some of them therefore took to trying falls with him, and to irritating his conceit with conversational pin-pricks: and at this sport the most skilful was Turgenev, who used purposely to inveigle Dostoievsky into argument, and then to goad him to the point of exasperation. With back (so to speak) planted against the wall, Dostoievsky would strike out at random in defence of views which, voiced

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in the heat of the moment, were mostly so uncouth that it afforded Turgenev the highest pleasure to attack them. Again, Dostoievsky evinced a marked tendency to suspiciousness, owing to the fact that a friend of his repeated to him everything that the circle might say of him or his 'Poor Folk.' Indeed, report had it that, for the love of the thing, that friend used to act as tale-bearer in general. Particularly did Dostoievsky suspect all and sundry of attempting to pooh-pooh his talent; and since he discerned in every guileless word a desire to belittle his work, and to affront him personally, it was in a mood of seething resentment which yearned to pick a quarrel, to vent upon his fancied detractors the whole measure of spleen that was choking his breast, that he used to visit our house. A painfully sensitive temperament of that kind ought to have been treated with indulgence; whereas people used to infuriate it the more by treating its manifestations with ridicule. Even against Bielinsky he conceived a grudge; for he asserted that Bielinsky only *feigned* his preference for his *protégé*. So much was this

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Dostoievsky's conviction that he ceased even to mention 'Poor Folk' to his patron. Said he spitefully on one occasion: 'To think of a man of sense spending even ten minutes over an idiotic pursuit like cards! Yet Bielinsky spends two or three hours at a time in that way! Truly the society of *littérateurs* is in no way distinguishable from that of *tchinovniks*, seeing that each of those categories passes its leisure in the same pursuit.'

"The truth was that, for fear of agitating his *protégé*, Bielinsky had taken to avoiding serious conversations with Dostoievsky: and this the latter attributed to coldness on Bielinsky's part. Sometimes, when Dostoievsky was engaged in a heated argument with Turgenev, Bielinsky would murmur to Nekrasov (with whom he would be playing cards): 'To think that Dostoievsky should talk such rubbish, and talk it so at random!' And when Dostoievsky had departed, and Turgenev would be repeating to Bielinsky some mordant, eccentric opinion of Dostoievsky's concerning one or another Russian writer, the great critic

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would remark: 'It is no good arguing with an ailing man. Yet you keep goading him as though you could not see that rage renders him unconscious of what he is saying.' When, too, Bielinsky was informed that Dostoievsky looked upon himself as a genius, the elder man shrugged his shoulders, and observed sadly: 'What a pity! Undoubtedly he has talent. But if, instead of developing that talent, he should make up his mind that he is already a genius, he will never get any further. What he needs is medical treatment: this sort of thing comes of over-excitement of the nerves. Evidently life is beginning to jar upon him, poor fellow! Yet grievous times are ahead of us, and it will need the nerves of a bullock to support the conditions of present-day existence. Should the dawn not speedily break, *all* of us will become psychic invalids.'

"Once, in Dostoievsky's presence, Turgenev started to relate how, somewhere in the provinces, he had encountered a man who imagined himself a person of phenomenal talent. And the narrator went on to give a

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most masterly picture of the ridiculous figure cut by the man. Presently Dostoievsky turned pale, fell to trembling all over, and left the room without waiting for the end of Turgenev's story. I remarked to the company: 'What on earth has driven Dostoievsky away like that?' but so diverting was Turgenev's mood, and so completely was he holding the attention of those present, that no one attributed any significance to Dostoievsky's hurried departure. Next Turgenev fell to improvising a set of humorous verses on the subject of Dievushkin, the hero of 'Poor Folk'; on the lines that Dievushkin was gratefully inditing them to Dostoievsky, in return for the latter having rendered all Russia conscious of his existence; but nothing more do I remember about the verses than that frequently there occurred in them the term 'Mamotchka.'¹

"From that evening onwards Dostoievsky showed himself no more at our house, and even shunned such members of the circle as he happened to meet in the street. Once, on encountering Panaev, who at once got ready

¹ "Dear Nurse."

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to stop the young author, for the purpose of inquiring why the latter had remained so long invisible, Dostoievsky actually crossed the roadway to avoid him! The only person whom he now consorted with was the friend of whom I have spoken, and who eventually told us that the young author was exceedingly angry with us all, that he no longer desired the acquaintance of any member of the circle, that he was greatly disappointed with us, and that he looked upon the circle as a band of mean, grudging, heartless individuals."

Dostoievsky has explained the matter otherwise. That is to say, he has attributed his rupture with Bielinsky and Bielinsky's circle to a difference of creed. Says he in a letter to Strakhov: "It was with Bielinsky as a phenomenon of Russian life, rather than with Bielinsky as an individual, that I quarrelled. In those days he represented one of the grossest, the meanest, the most pestiferous manifestations of that life; and were he alive now, he would still be foaming at the mouth, and inditing those pagan articles which used to disgrace our country, and to deny it its

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greatest son " (Pushkin). " But look you here. You never knew the man ; whereas I knew him, and saw much of him, and have since been able to appraise him at his value. *He* fell foul of *me*, although he and all his fellow-agitators put together were not fit to hold a candle to Our Saviour Christ. The truth is that he was incapable of detecting to what an extent he and his world were charged with malice and intolerance and mockery and baseness and conceit." And so on, and so on—all for the purpose of proving that Bielinsky was at once a pagan phenomenon and an indifferent critic.

Yet be it noted that this does not constitute Dostoievsky's only expression of opinion on the subject of Bielinsky, for his opinions changed with his moods, and to determine how far the element of personal, petty, egotistic vexation entered into the above-quoted words would be impossible. Indeed, at times he expressed himself quite differently concerning his patron. For instance, in a letter written in 1846, he applies to Bielinsky the epithet " noble " ; and, should one take into review

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also his testimony at the time of the rupture, it will be found that there appears in it not a single word regarding convictions or differences of convictions. That phase of the matter cropped up only at a later date.

Clearly the root of the rupture lay in the fact that the characters of the two men were incapable of mutual agreement. Nor, at this period, had Dostoievsky *any one* with whom his resentful and painfully irritable conceit would permit him to associate. Even against the imperturbable, the witty, the self-assured Turgenev his enmity came chiefly of the fact that the other represented his direct antithesis. Yet at least Dostoievsky might have paid homage to Bielinsky's lofty morality; and his failure so to do caused, first estrangement, and then a feeling of absolute hostility, to replace their short-lived friendship. No matter what Dostoievsky may say on the point, the circumstance is one which no one can fail to regret, seeing that, while Dostoievsky could not have learnt anything bad from Bielinsky, intercourse and association with the critic might have helped him to confirm, to translate into action,

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his youthful dreams on the subject of independent literary work, and of the necessity of a young writer attaining his strength before forcing his creative powers to experience the pressure of external and material needs. True, like Dostoievsky, Bielinsky was a literary journeyman, and served in the house of bondage to the end of his life; but never did he allow his daily labour to abrogate his view that literature is a great and a holy calling. With Bielinsky the principle of literary independence and a definite literary tendency first made its appearance in Russian life; in his eyes that independence was a *moral* demand, and only his conscience—not poverty nor any other external goad—could have driven him to forego it. Strange, therefore, that Dostoievsky should so have forgotten these considerations as to generalize the activity of his patron under the one phrase “a pagan phenomenon”! Stranger still that the phrase should never have evoked from Dostoievsky’s lips a word of repentance! Herein is more than Dostoievsky’s customary captiousness: in it we see, rather, the hysterical, the wholly

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ungovernable rancour of which Dostoievsky's nature was undoubtedly capable. However, the fact that he drifted away from Bielinsky deprived him of much. In particular, it deprived him of that guidance whereof his undisciplined nature stood so greatly in need, as is exemplified by the circumstance that he bound himself, hand and foot, to Kraevsky, who fettered him with advance fees, and then, while playing the rôle of benefactor, sucked from him the life-blood, and overworked his powers to the point of exhaustion.

But let us retrace our steps. The success of "Poor Folk" exceeded all expectations, and for a while raised Dostoievsky's drooping spirits—much as an invalid's might be. That is to say, for a time he seriously believed that he had attained fame, that he had become practically the first literary star in Russia, that he had eclipsed Gogol himself. But swift disenchantment followed. A few failures, and everything had gone awry. For this *dénouement* Dostoievsky himself was primarily responsible, in that he hastened both to get into debt and to undertake more literary work than

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his strength could cope with. In fact, the number of works which he bound himself to write was at least ten, and he went to pieces not only through the actual labour of it all, but also through his lack of method and his morbid sensibility. That is to say, at one and the same time he attempted to compose a dozen long stories, a dozen short, and an equal number of pamphlets. Among other things, he spent much toil over a novel called "The Twins." Yet that labour was now of a forced, halting, enervated order—labour which overwound and tortured his faculties. He complains of weariness, and writes to his brother: "Never have I known such a grievous time as the present. *Ennui*, depression, apathy, and a sort of feverish, spasmodic expectation of better things to come harass me almost to the point of extinction. What a malady! No one but the devil can know what it is like! Would I were rid of it!" Again, worn out with work, he writes: "By the 5th of January I must furnish Kraevsky with the first portion of my novel 'Netotchka Nezvanova.' Consequently I am writing day and night." Pecuniary

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embarrassments worried him. "With Kraevsky's aid I hope to pay off the whole of my obligations. Indeed, my one aim is to work for him all the winter, and then, by the summer, to have not a *kopeck* of debt. But *shall* I ever get rid of my indebtedness? Terrible indeed to have to work as a journeyman, for it means the ruin of everything—of one's talent, of one's youth, of one's hopes. Yes, work of that kind merely spoils one, and makes of one a scribbler rather than a writer." Again: "You would hardly believe it, but, though this is the third year since I embarked upon my literary career, I am still being sweated! No life do I see, I have no time to pull myself together, through want of leisure I am losing all that ever I learnt. Oh that I could halt awhile! Indeed is it a doubtful notoriety that I have won! Nor do I know the probable duration of this hell which has brought me poverty and contract work, but never a moment's rest." Despondent reflections such as these—reflections due to lack of funds and to literary failure—were ever in his mind.

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“The Twins” missed fire to an extent which put even Dostoievsky himself out of love with the work. More than once does he complain of the failure, saying in his letters: “Both my set, Bielinsky, and every one else are blaming me for ‘Goliadkin’; while, in addition, the general public considers ‘The Twins’ so dull as to be unreadable.” But what especially dismayed him was the failure of “The Landlady” (1847). Certainly it was a weak production from the literary point of view, but the real sting lay in the fact that by some trick of self-deception its creator had taken a huge delight in its composition. He writes that “the story is altogether different from the ‘Prokharkhin,’ over which I have been tormenting myself this summer.” Nor was the story finished before he became filled with a conviction that it was destined to eclipse even “Poor Folk.” But events proved that “The Landlady” pleased no one. Bielinsky, for his part, voted the work hysterical rubbish; nor from the literary point of view was he wrong in his estimate. Henceforth Dostoievsky began to

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come in for a good deal of depreciation—the current opinion being that he had written himself out; and at times he himself felt inclined to take the same view, and, for that reason, flung his last remaining strength into an effort to achieve something great. But the haste with which he worked rendered any such result impossible, and meanwhile his frame of mind was becoming worse and worse—it was becoming the frame of mind inevitable for a talented author who was tied to literary journey-work, the frame of mind inevitable for a nervous, hyper-sensitive man who was labouring to achieve everything at a stroke, yet alternating between supreme rapture and the lowest depths of despair. “I am everything,” “I am nothing”—he swung backwards and forwards between the two poles.

In time that malady assumed a dangerous form. It constituted a malady, not of the body, but of the spirit. That is to say, he was not so much ailing as imagining himself to be ailing. Ceaselessly he doctored himself, in the fear, now that he was going mad,

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now that he was falling into consumption. And eventually these doubts and suspicions led to his becoming in very truth an invalid. During this period his favourite pursuit was to read medical books, and then to search himself for likely symptoms. In fact, his persistency ended by disgusting even himself. Also, his natural impatience—an impatience in itself amounting to a malady—caused him constantly to be expecting from life some terrible shock, some dire calamity; and at intervals he would exclaim: “A change is bound to take place in the present condition of things; all this is bound soon to come to an end!” In the same way, though he continued to be tortured with unsatisfied conceit, life filled him with fear—it seemed ever to be threatening want, and presaging every imaginable horror, and presenting to the sufferer’s gaze, now a death from starvation, now a death in a hospital ward. Exhausted physically, rent and broken from the moral point of view, he began increasingly to believe that such a mode of life could not long continue. Yet how to live otherwise he knew not;

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and though the literary tow-rope cut and galled his shoulders, and though his breast seemed to be bursting under its weight, his lack of spirit led him to strain at the burden un-restingly, dully, and aimlessly as, with eyes peering despondently forward into the future, he writhed beneath a premonition which proved to be justified.

IV.

Petrashovsky's circle—Dostoevsky's arrest—His dispatch to penal servitude—The influence of prison life upon his character and general outlook.

THE forties of the nineteenth century constituted an epoch of vigorous, but unseen, ferment. To this day our Russian life owes much to it, seeing that the period in question saw the literature and the intellectual bent of Russia acquire new forms. That is to say, after long roaming the wilds of German idealistic philosophy, Russian thought realized its own civic and social problems, and, in consequence, Russian literature assumed a novel shape, and for the first time became conscious of itself as a social factor. In other words, there first dawned upon us the idea of our *tendency* in literary composition.

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This new phase of the literary sense is well described by Bielinsky in speaking of the year 1842. "The spirit of our time is such," says the great critic, "that its glorious creative force will prove but a nine days' wonder if it should remain confined to birdlike song, or should fashion for itself a world between which and the historical and philosophical activity of the day there lies nothing in common, or should conceive the earth to be unworthy of it, and its proper place to be the clouds, or should believe the hopes and the travail of the world to be unfit to mingle with its poetical visions and its occult outlook. Natural talent alone will never carry us far. Even as a candle requires a wick for its continual burning, so does literary talent require a backing of reason. Between freedom of creation and observance of contemporary tendencies there need be no discrepancy. To attain such freedom we need not compel ourselves to write to a given theme, nor to place any undue strain upon our fancy. All that we need do is to remain citizens, sons of our community and of our

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epoch, and to adopt the interests of the latter, and to fuse with them our own aspirations. In short, what we need is merely a measure of love and sympathy, combined with such a healthy, practical instinct for truth as will keep us from divorcing convictions from reality, composition from life."

Thus at the period in question intellectual thought began to assume an increasingly practical character; and by the time that a decade had elapsed it had travelled the long road from German Optimistic Idealism to Socialism. Of this signs may be seen in the fact that Miliutin began to write his politico-economic studies, Valerian Maikov to compose his critical articles, and various authors to express the following opinion: "The most important and the most characteristic phenomenon of present-day Russian life is the vigorous solicitude of the community for its own material interests, the fact that the material welfare of man occupies the mind of every one of the social *strata*. The betterment of mundane existence, the provision of a sufficiency for all—herein we see the chief

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question, the crying need, of the day. While the metaphysical epoch of Germanized life has come to an end, our attention and our hopes are turned unanimously to the demands of social existence, which is powerless to progress amid the chill abstractions of philosophical systems. Hence it is to the social sciences that priority should be awarded, and the interests of actuality must be made to extend to the community at large; while learning must take as its principal task the demonstration of the laws governing an equal distribution of wealth among all the classes of a given community" (*Notes of the Fatherland*, Vol. X., 1848).

The mental attitude which gave birth to these ideas is not difficult to comprehend; nor shall we have more difficulty in determining the views of serf right which that attitude was bound to evoke. Not only was the attitude in question bound to deny that right, whether from the philanthropic point of view or from that of universal human justice, but also it was bound to form a clear understanding of the economic and political injury

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done by the system. And to the confirmation of Russian public opinion in this practical point of view the French literature of the day (more particularly the writings of George Sand) would assist the mass of other liberal publications then flooding Russia through contraband channels to contribute. At all events, among the youth of Russia there now arose a great ferment, and many "circles" and associations were formed. Of these the best-known was the Circle of Petrashevsky; and it was to one of the dependencies of the latter—that is to say, to the Circle of Durov—that Dostoievsky himself belonged.

"The members of this group," says Miliukov in his "Discourses," "selected the Censorship for one of their principal objects of attack; but, in general, they occupied themselves with political questions, more especially with the question of the emancipation of the peasantry." Indeed, how could a man like Dostoievsky fail to take an interest in that question, seeing that he had been brought up on Schiller, Victor Hugo, and

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George Sand, and had all his life sided with "the despised and the rejected"? But of revolution in any form he never for a moment dreamed. On the contrary, he used often to declare that the Russian people would not follow in the footsteps of the rebels of Europe. Adds Miliukov: "On one occasion I remember him reading aloud, with his accustomed energy, Pushkin's poem on solitude: and to this day I can hear the triumphant tone in which he declaimed the concluding couplet:—

"My friends, I see the people no longer oppressed,
And slavery fallen by the will of the Tsar,
And a dawn breaking over us, glorious and bright,
And our country lightened by freedom's rays.'"

Once, and only once, did Dostoievsky flare up and become carried out of himself. This was when a dispute had arisen over the question, "What if it should be impossible to emancipate the peasantry save through a rising?" "Then *let* it be through a rising!" he exclaimed. But later on, "while confessing that he looked upon certain changes

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and improvements as possible, he stated that he proposed to look for such things from the Government." Nevertheless, the Circle based great hopes upon him as a propagandist, and we find Debut saying: "To this day I seem to see Thedor Mikhaïlovitch speaking at our evening gatherings at Petrashevsky's, and to hear him relating how a sergeant-major had been made to run the gauntlet of a Finnish regiment, and how landowners were accustomed to treat their serfs. And no less vividly do I remember him reciting his 'Netotchka Nezvanova'—though in an ampler form than that of the printed version; while, lastly, I have a clear remembrance of the real, the very human, sentiment with which he had begun to treat the social product which subsequently he personified in the character of Sonetchka Marmeladov." In general, the Petrashevsky group may be said to have constituted, in its views and its programme, a joint attempt on the part of the principal and the subsidiary circles to arouse the community, first, to a public hatred of, and, secondly, to an agitation for the total annulment of, serf

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right. But at no time did it dream of a "Constitution." On the contrary, it looked upon such a device with contempt, and, of European doctrines, was chiefly permeated with Socialism according to the *formulæ* and the fantasies of Fourier; while towards the European organization of the day it maintained an attitude as negative as towards that of Russia.

So far as Dostoievsky was concerned, this remained permanently the case; and when, in his "Diary of a Writer," he speaks of the then position in Europe he is but repeating the sentiments of the Petrashevskyists. Said they: "The new conquerors of the world" (that is to say, the *bourgeois*, the third estate) "have shown themselves worse than the old tyrants, while liberty, equality, and fraternity have turned out to be but sounding phrases. In short, the political changes wrought by those conquerors have proved barren of result, since life contains as many of 'the despised and the rejected' as ever it did, even if not more. The Great Revolution of 1789 decided not a single social question, and the

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fundamental contradiction between wealth and poverty has failed to become reconciled, seeing that to this day Europe shows the two factors in the matter confronting one another with arms in their hands. In short, in the situation we can discern nothing but unmitigated evil and a continued threat of bloody revolution; whereas in Russia" (Dostoievsky added this last after the Period of Reform) "the proletariat has at a stroke decided matters by freeing the peasants from the soil."

But in 1849 the peasants had not yet attained that freedom, and Dostoievsky ended by becoming a revolutionary.

Dostoievsky—a revolutionary : assuredly there would seem to lurk a certain discrepancy between the two appellations, so completely have we come to look upon Dostoievsky as a sincere and convinced Christian who preached only a dim belief in the cleansing power of suffering. Yet now we see him standing forth as a warrior ready to go out into the market-place with a red flag, and there to proclaim a new existence of a

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kind destined to accord with the very truth which subsequently he denied with such energy, and even with such hatred ! How came he to this point ? At once it may be asserted that he acted with no doctrine in his head, nor in pursuance of any doctrine. Rather, though he was, first and foremost, a man of sensibility, a man who lived on concrete impressions, a man of timid and diffident temperament, he was also, thanks to that same timidity, to that same diffidence, a man capable of sudden outbreaks of the kind stated. And though never, from start to finish, had he agreed with the fanatical, the *doctrinaire* Petrashevsky, his natural kindness of heart had kept being aroused by the scenes of violence which he had seen enacted before his eyes. Thus it was through his own failures, through his own clouded life, that the singer of "the despised and the rejected" became seized with a burning rage against contemporary existence, and decided to rebel against it with a vigour drawn from his own despair. Often this happens—very often ; for momentary, but keen, impulses of

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fury are the peculiar province of the weak and the undisciplined, whose strength is not the strength of will or of conviction, but the strength born of abandonment of hope. Eventually Dostoievsky and others were arrested, thrown into prison, and, of course, allotted solitary confinement. Subsequently he received sentence of exile.

During the first stage, however, the stage of prison in Russia, he was not greatly dismayed by his surroundings. He read much, thought out a couple of novels and three shorter stories, and looked forward with a certain amount of confidence to the future. Apparently his chief concern was not for his own fortunes, but for those of his brother Mikhail, who, become a married man with a family, had, in error, been arrested along with Thedor. The latter writes from prison: "My dearest brother, I was unspeakably cheered by your letter, which reached me on June 11th. So you are free again! How well I can imagine the joy with which you must have rejoined your family! How well I can imagine the eagerness with which they must

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have been awaiting you ! Also, your letter tells me that you are engaged in establishing a new *ménage*. How and on what are you living ? Have you any work in hand ? And, if so, what ? Summer in the city must be truly wearisome ! And the more so since, as you say that you have taken a new flat, I imagine that the new one is even smaller than the old." The writer himself is in no way cast down. " Naturally, things here are dull and nauseating, but what else was to be expected ? Moreover, things are not *always* dull. That is to say, the time passes unevenly—sometimes it rushes along, and sometimes it drags ; while on other occasions one feels almost as though one had become used to the life, and as though nothing greatly mattered. Of course, so far as I can, I strive to put away all distracting thoughts from me ; but moments there are when one *cannot* get the better of them, and one's former life, with its impressions, returns intermittently, and one lives the past over again. For the most part, the weather here is fine. When that is so, things assume a more cheerful air, and it is only

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when the weather is bad that things become difficult to bear, for then the prison looks even gloomier than usual. For the rest, I have not been letting my time run to waste. I have thought out three stories and a couple of novels, one of which is even now in process of being written, though I fear to work over-hard at it. Sleep lasts some five hours out of the twenty-four, and I awake some four or five times during the night. The most wearisome time is when dusk is closing in, but by nine o'clock it is completely dark. How I should love to spend a day—only one day—with you! Soon three months will have elapsed since we were shut up here. Yet I expect to be where I am for some time yet. My main object in life is to preserve my health, for weariness is a thing which will pass, whereas it is important to keep up one's spirits. What a fund of vigour and resistance does a man contain! I never realized this until I came to learn it by experience." True, the next letter from prison is pitched in a more minor key; yet still it reveals the fact that the writer is making a manful effort to

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keep himself in hand rather than allow his soul to lose all hope of returning to the life which it has left outside the prison walls. "About my future," writes Dostoievsky, "I have nothing very definite to say; for everything connected with our affair still hangs in suspense. But as regards my personal existence, its continued monotony is mitigated by the fact that I have received renewed permission to walk in the garden (which contains seventeen trees). That constitutes happiness number one. Also, I have received renewed permission to have a candle at night-time. That constitutes happiness number two. And a third piece of happiness would be if you were to answer this letter at once, and also to send me *Notes of the Fatherland*. For that journal I look as does a country subscriber—its arrival represents to me a whole epoch, even as it does to the provincial landowner who is overburdened with time. Likewise, would you send me a few historical works? I should be so delighted. And, best of all, would you send me a Bible? Concerning my health, I cannot say much that is

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favourable. For a month past I have been subsisting principally on castor-oil, and only just managing to keep alive at that; for the pain in my chest is increasing to a degree hitherto unknown to my experience. Also, my nervous condition is certainly growing worse. Night-time is when it is at its worst, for then, long, formless dreams come to me. Lastly, the floor has begun to appear to heave under my chair; so that, as I sit in my cell, I seem, rather, to be sitting in the cabin of a ship."

By final decree of the court which tried Dostoievsky, he was sentenced to four years' penal servitude in the prison of Omsk in Siberia.

* * * * *

The journey to Tobolsk was successfully accomplished, save that a few cases of loss of fingers or ears or noses through frostbite occurred. "When we arrived at Tobolsk," writes Dostoievsky, "and were awaiting our further disposal in the transport yard attached to the prison, the wives of certain Dekabrist

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prisoners¹ obtained leave from the Superintendent to arrange for us a welcome in their quarters, where they blessed us upon our further journey, and presented us each with a Testament—the only book subsequently allowed us in prison.” From Tobolsk Dostoievsky and Durov were dispatched to Omsk, where they were assigned hard labour in the Second Division.

With that began a life full of suffering. Yet I need not say much about it here, except to refer to one of Dostoievsky's most remarkable works, the well-known “Letters from a Dead House.” Herein Dostoievsky has collected the whole of his prison impressions, and ~~thereby~~ has stigmatized for ever those things of “the recent, yet not recent, past” which, with other abuses of then Russian life, were swept away by the great reforms of Alexander's reign. In these “Letters” the abuses in question are set forth in detail; though not for long past have there existed the atrocious

¹ The abortive Dekabrist conspiracy broke out in St. Petersburg in December 1825 (hence the name Dekabrist or Decembrist).

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“majors” who styled themselves “majors by the mercy of God,” nor yet the men who fell, crippled and lacerated, beneath their rods. Thus the “Letters” constitute an historical document; and as one reads them one cannot help exclaiming, “Thank God! that such things have ceased to be!” In passing, the reader will remember that the story purports to be told by a certain Alexander Petrovitch, a *dворянин* who, for wife murder, has been sentenced to penal servitude in the Second Division.

“The Second Division to which I was allotted consisted of convicts under military dispensation, and was immeasurably more severe in its *régime* than the other two Divisions—the Divisions of the factories and of the mines. Not only for us *dворянѣ* was it more severe, but also for all the prisoners, in that its directorate and its organization were of a military character, and caused the Division closely to resemble one of the disciplinary battalions which obtain in Russia proper. In everything military rule is stricter, and the military system more cramping, than is the

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civilian. Consequently in the Second Division we were constantly in fetters, constantly marching under escort, constantly living under lock and key; whereas in the other two Divisions these things did not obtain to anything like the same extent."

Nevertheless, should a prisoner happen to possess a small fund of money, he could procure a slight alleviation of his miserable lot. That is to say, he could brew his own tea in his own teapot, and also obtain a little addition to his food—though (to quote Dostoievsky on the subject) the prison fare was "barely tolerable," and the *stchi*, or cabbage soup, generally full of black beetles. To the latter circumstance, however, the convicts paid no attention, and even Dostoievsky writes: "The first thing which struck me in the life was that I seemed to find no feature of it very remarkable or unusual or, to be more precise, *unexpected*. Indeed, I even formed the impression that prison life was easier than I had anticipated while on the journey, as well as that the labour was less hard and penal. Only long afterwards did I realize that the severity

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and the punishment of that labour lay less in its arduousness and its constant repetition than in the condition that it was *forced* labour, labour performed under penalty of chastisement." Yet he executed his tasks with zest and "gladly," since thereby he hoped to improve his health. In particular, he had a liking for clearing away snow and quarrying alabaster.

During the first three days after his arrival he was not "goaded forth" to work, but allowed to rest and look about him. Nevertheless, the rule of exemption extended no further than this, and thereafter there began for him penal servitude in the true sense of the term. No sooner had he entered the prison ward than he perceived the character of his future companions, for among the scores of battered, branded faces which glimmered all about him were those of a party of comers, the lean features of a young fellow who had butchered eight souls, and a number of dull, sullen-looking jowls which, gazing morosely from under close-cropped, misshapen polls, included in their scrutiny the *dvorianin*, the fine

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gentleman, Dostoievsky. Next, on the new-comer entering his own ward or "barrack," he obtained his first taste of a life lived amid "smoke and grime, curses of an unspeakable cynicism, an atmosphere mephitical in its nature, a constant clashing of fetters, and an eternal babel of imprecations and lewd laughter." Tortured and stunned with the monstrous impressions of the day, he stretched himself out upon the bare sleeping-board, folded his jacket for a pillow (since no such article was provided), covered himself with his greatcoat, and attempted to go to sleep. But sleep would not come; only dim thoughts kept coursing through his brain, and indefinable, oppressive forebodings casting a weight upon his heart. And as he thought of the future, of the four years which, to his imagination, seemed to stretch out into eternity, he found that the reflection which most horrified him was the thought that "never, no, never for a single moment, should I be alone. Always I should be working under an escort, or living confined with two hundred 'comrades,' so that not for a second should I be by myself." And, in

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view of the fact that comradeship against one's will, comradeship under the lash, is under any circumstances galling, it was bound to be all the more so in that spot, in that prison, where it would also be continuous. Every type and condition of individual was there collected. "One man was a Cantonist, another a Circassian, a third a *Raskolnik*, a fourth an Orthodox peasant who had left in his native village a beloved wife and children, a fifth a Jew, a sixth a gipsy, a seventh a nondescript, and so forth. And all these men had perforce to live together, to get on together, to eat out of the same dish, and to rest on the same sleeping-board." True, there was included also a sprinkling of men of education, but Dostoievsky seems to have felt little drawn towards them, and to have found himself confronted with isolation and the deadly monotony of a life that teemed with material privations and spiritual hardships. One day resembled another as one pea resembles its fellows; and of necessity Dostoievsky's life became centred wholly in himself. Shall we attempt to reconstruct a typical day of his existence? To the

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sound of a drum beaten at a very early hour the inmates would rise reluctantly (especially if the season was the winter-time), and, after washing themselves in pails filled with water of doubtful cleanliness, would breakfast (in default of tea provided by any member of the party) off black bread alone. In addition, from the first moment of their rising they would embark upon an endless bout of fighting and quarrelling—fighting and quarrelling for which any and every sort of a trifle would serve as a pretext, and the course of which would be protracted artistically, and with close attention to detail, and with the most strenuous efforts to invent that terminological combination of aptness and opprobrium which constituted the prisoners' most valued weapon of offence. True, the affair never developed into an actual brawl; but at any moment it might have done so, had not the "comrades," realizing the unpleasant consequences which would ensue for every man present, invariably checked the disputants as soon as ever they perceived matters to be growing serious. Later, the crusts of bread consumed, the con-

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victs would be mustered, and then marched forth to work. In gangs they proceeded, and usually in a sullen silence. True, here and there a chatterbox would strive to create a diversion with some unsolicited waggery, but the efforts of these fellows never met with aught but a vast and crushing contempt, which found expression mostly in the term "*Bezpoleznie liudi.*"¹ The reason of this was that, when on the march, the majority of the convicts spared no pains to preserve their human dignity as they understood it, and that that dignity lay, first and foremost, in the maintenance of an air of reserve, in the "keeping of a watch over oneself," in the affectation of a sort of gloomy self-concentration which forbade men to speak their real minds, or to indulge in any form of mutual abuse. Only on meeting a stranger did they solicit alms. "Once," says Alexander Petrovitch, "we encountered on the road a *miestchanin*,² who halted and put his hand to his pocket. Instantly one of our number left the ranks, doffed his cap, accepted the gift (it was a

¹ "Useless fellows."

² Trader.

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sum of five *kopecks*), and rejoined us at leisure. The same morning the five *kopecks* were spent upon rolls, which we divided equally among the members of our party." On reaching the scene of their labours the majority of the convicts would embark upon their tasks with reluctance, with anything but a show of energy; and for this the reason was that few of those tasks had any meaning attached to them—for the most part they were tasks of a kind designed only to keep idle hands employed. An instance is seen in the fact that the convicts would be set to break up old rafts, although timber was abundant in the region, and therefore not of the slightest value. Naturally, the convicts themselves divined the futility of such work, and plied their axes with the more laziness and indifference. Only when an *urok*—that is to say, a piece of work appointed to be done by a given time—was set them was any spirit of animation manifested; for in that case an exercise of industry would enable the *urok* to be completed sooner than the hour prescribed by the time-table. Indeed, on occasions of this kind

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not only was indolence cast aside, but also there appeared an instinct of emulation. Our *dворянин* prisoner did his best to work like the rest, but for long found his efforts unsuccessful. "I tried my utmost to help my fellows," he writes, "yet always felt out of place, and found myself a hindrance, and ended by being driven away with abuse." In fact, the very dregs, the very pariahs, of the prison seemed to consider themselves entitled to treat the *dворянин*, the fine gentleman, with contempt. But subsequently more congenial work was found for the party, in the shape of turning the wheels of some alabaster-crushing machines and of working in a brick factory on the banks of the River Irtysh. True, this proximity to Nature, to the panorama presented by the great, placid river and the boundless, rolling plains of the Khirgiz Steppes, was calculated to excite a sense of depression, and to make the heart ache for a chance to escape ; but all around were armed guards, and the least movement on the part of a convict caused his heavy chains to clank. To improve his health, Dostoievsky laboured hard at his

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appointed tasks ; and soon his endeavours (he noted the fact with joy) began to be crowned with success. " In that accursed prison life," he writes, " a man needs physical strength as much as he does moral, if ever he is to survive its numerous material hardships." Work over, the convicts would be marched back to prison, and then given dinner, and then exercised in a courtyard encircled by a lofty, spike-surmounted wall. Lastly, evening roll-call over, every one would be placed under lock and key for the night. Naturally, the convicts did not go to sleep at once, but in one corner and another would begin a series of discussions, relatings of experiences, games of cards, other games of a nature peculiar to jails, and quarrels, while the night stove would diffuse a foetid stench, and countless jail insects, of a unique ferocity, would, for hours at a time, prevent the man not hardened to their onslaughts from sleeping. Such the stereotyped programme on week-days. And on festival days, when there was nothing to do, the time passed more slowly and more tediously even than on ordinary days. For his

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part, Alexander Petrovitch spent the greater part of such days in wandering about the prison, or in counting and re-counting the spikes on the prison wall. Yet these pursuits could not altogether banish melancholy reflections. On the greater festivals, however, a certain liveliness was imparted to this existence. For instance, before Easter the great fast was observed; and to the end of his life the first Easter of his life in prison remained, with Dostoievsky, an abiding recollection. He writes: "It was long since I had been in church; and, what with the Good Friday service—a service familiar to me from the days of my boyhood at home—and what with the solemn prayers and the profound genuflections, I felt my soul stirring with a feeling to which it had long been a stranger. Indeed, the morning when we marched along a road hardened by the night's frost, and entered (escorted by warders with loaded rifles) God's House, I felt quite cheerful! Arrived, we stood herded together by the door—that is to say, in the lowest place of all. And as I stood there, there came back to me the reflection

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how, when in church during the days of my boyhood, I had been wont to gaze at the common people near the entrance, and to feel that somehow they must be praying in a different way from ourselves—that they must be praying in a more humble, more grovelling fashion, and with a fuller sense of their abasement. And now it had befallen me to stand in the very same place as they had done—albeit with this difference, that I and my companions stood there cowed and fettered! Every one in the church drew away from us, as though all were afraid of us; yet at the same time we were given alms, and I remember that somehow the circumstance communicated to me a sort of pleasure, and something subtly resembling a sense of relief.” Also, on festival days the prison assumed a partially holiday aspect. That is to say, the convicts donned clean shirts, and, for a while, wore a different expression on their faces. But this never lasted for long, for by evening the majority of the prisoners would be stretched on the sleeping-board in a state of hideous, quarrelsome intoxication, and the air would be foul

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with curses and an insufferable stench, and in every quarter there would be seen faces inflamed with maudlin or uproarious inebriety. On these occasions weariness for want of something to do, grief induced by the crowding memories of his boyhood's festivals, and pain at having to witness such ugly scenes would drive Dostoievsky into the prison yard, and there leave him glad to sit huddled under the spiked wall of the jail. However, one Christmas night the convicts organized some theatricals, and the prison hummed with excitement, for every one felt interested in the novelty, as well as gratified by the fact both that he and his companions had been trusted in the matter, and that the prison authorities themselves were coming to view the convict actors' performance. In short, for once in a way the prisoners realized that they also were human beings, and therefore evinced greater heartiness of spirit, and likewise a decreased tendency to indulge in bad language, drunkenness, and vice. Of the latter fact the reason was that, proud of the confidence reposed in them, the convicts themselves maintained

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order. "For a while these men were permitted to live at will, to make merry like other members of humanity, and to spend an hour as though not in jail; and during that brief interval every man became an altered individual from what he had lately been."

To our *dvorianin* prisoner no indulgences or exemptions whatsoever were conceded—he had to drag about the same fetters as the rest of the convicts, to eat the same food as they, to wear the same dress, and to perform the same labour. Yet scarcely need it be said that these things were ten times harder for him to bear than they were for the ordinary convicts—that, as a man of education, he was perpetually conscious of privations of which the rest never even became aware. For instance, he had to forego his usual practice of reading, since no book other than the Bible was allowed in prison, and even that was soon stolen from him. Consequently, if the rough treatment that was meted out provoked protests from the ordinary criminals (who were mostly ex-serfs), it can easily be imagined

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what such brutality must have meant to the man of culture. Yes, no matter what any one may say to the contrary, prison life in that spot must have been indeed a dark and terrible burden !

Durov also changed greatly for the worse in jail. " He arrived a good-humoured, handsome young fellow, and he departed a shattered, grey-headed dotard who could scarcely walk, and was afflicted with asthma." Sometimes to endure the life became a physical impossibility ; and then the sufferer was removed to the prison infirmary, where he had kind and skilful doctors to attend him, and where the *régime* according to a fixed programme, with its many hardships and privations, pressed less hardly upon a man than in the prison itself, since in the infirmary he could at least rest undisturbed (though in a foul cot, and clad in a noisome hospital dressing-gown), and sleep without being awakened by the drum, and escape the incidence of work.

* * * * *

Next we come to the very difficult question

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of the influence exercised upon Dostoievsky's character and outlook by his term of penal servitude. In this connection it may be stated at once that Dostoievsky himself alternately curses and blesses that time of bondage. As for Miller, he has put forward a theory that prison life constituted, for Dostoievsky, "a lesson in popular truth"; while Maikov roundly asserts that the life benefited our author, Yiaztzhensky shares Maikov's belief that it assisted to develop Dostoievsky's literary talent, N. K. Mikhailovsky attributes to Dostoievsky's sojourn in Siberia a purely negative, or even a harmful, effect, and Dostoievsky's own opinions on the subject mutually contradict one another.

Thus the question would appear to be still undecided. And, indeed, to answer it *a priori* would be impossible, for upon different persons penal servitude produces different effects. Some, like Durov, it shatters; others, like Petrashevsky, it embitters; others, like Dostoievsky, it softens. Certainly, with regard to Dostoievsky, it brought about a profound mitigation of acerbity in his views, even though

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we cannot assert that those views underwent any *radical* change, seeing that even before his term of exile mystical ideas had bulked large in his character, and he had been permeated with a respect for Christianity. Moreover, his temperament (this we shall note more fully presently) remained the same unequal, hysterical, easily depressed factor which it had been before. True, in his letters from Semipalatinska Dostoievsky declares that he has become a different individual, and that his melancholy has wholly disappeared ; yet those letters were written when he had just left prison, and therefore at a time when melancholy was unlikely to be in the ascendant. Also, although, at a later date, he says that, while in prison, he mixed with the masses, and became fraternally one with them, he adds a comment that to tell the full story of the rebirth of his convictions would be a matter of some difficulty. " Their rebirth took place gradually, and only after a long while."

Yet the question is not one which we can overlook ; wherefore let us attempt to answer it apart from any preconceived theory, and

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merely on the basis of existing biographies. If we can judge by the proverb "All's well that ends well," Dostoievsky's term of penal servitude *did* to a certain extent benefit him. That is to say, we have seen that, up to the time of his arrest, his mental attitude was in every respect deplorable, and likely to end in suicide, in that, so far from evincing any exercise of will, he was leading nothing but a headlong, impatient existence. So, at all events, his biographies tell us. And to that we may add that for some time past he had been expecting of fortune some grievous blow, the occurrence of some sudden change in life; though what would have become of his life if Fate had not stepped in with an extraneous interference in the shape of his dispatch to the prison of Omsk it is impossible to say. Perhaps he would have done away with himself; perhaps, through conviction or despair, he would have developed into a revolutionary; perhaps time would have helped him to acquire self-control. Each conjecture is at least possible. But events proved that it was from without that the long-looked-for blow came;

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and though we have seen that it did not absolutely stun Dostoievsky, since a spiritual crisis had long been maturing, and was now demanding a solution, we need not from that infer that his imprisonment left no trace upon his personality. Passing over the question of the effect upon his health and his literary talent with a mere expression of opinion that his health would have derived greater benefit from a hospital than it could do from a jail, and that it is unusual for literary talent to require for its development so radical a change of climate and surroundings, we may go on to suppose that, in general, Dostoievsky's prison experiences exercised upon him what I might call a "toning down" effect. True, the thought that he had successfully survived a harassing ordeal, that the bitterest period in his life was over, may have inspired him with a certain temporary vivacity; but never did that vivacity exceed the limits of his personal life and activity—in every other sphere he underwent a restriction. Naturally, he could not, after his four years' internment, contemplate a repetition of the Petrashevsky affair;

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and since he had formerly taken up arms against life more through loss of hope than for any other reason, he now relinquished the contest, and became a man of peace in the sense that, having for four years been penned within impassable barriers, he had come to realize his weakness in the face of existing conditions. Indeed, the formula "What I will, that I will do" is wholly inapplicable to prison life, for prison is a force which suppresses and annuls the personal *ego*. And of that fact the truth had come home to Dostoievsky. Thus, while his temperament and his views remained the same, the sort of timidity or awe of life which had, from the first, been a part of his character now bulked larger, and came into greater prominence, and ousted his quondam bursts of initiative and self-will.

The theory seems simple; but, to make more sure of understanding it, let us study Dostoievsky's internal life during the time that he dwelt in prison. By so doing we shall realize more plainly the "toning down" effect exercised by his confinement.

What especially pained him in prison was

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the fact that he "stood divorced from the sort of society to which he was accustomed." In other words, between him and his involuntary companions superior birth and education had set impassable barriers. "The most striking point is the fact that, within two hours of his arriving at the prison, every new-comer would become exactly like all the rest—become a man who, while perfectly at home among them, could at once assume full and equal rights with every other member of the prison *artel* or community, and seem intelligible to all, as they to him, and live on familiar terms with all, and be appraised by all precisely for what he was. But with a gentleman, a *dvorianin*, things were different. No matter how unassuming and good-tempered and intelligent he might be, he would, to the end, remain a person unanimously hated and despised, and never understood, and, still more, never trusted. No one would ever come to look upon him as a friend or a comrade, and though, as the years went on, he might at least attain the point of ceasing to serve as a butt for insult, he would still be powerless to live his own

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life, or to get rid of the torturing thought that he was lonely and a stranger. Sometimes this driving of him into isolation would come about, not through any wilful cruelty on the convicts' part, but, rather, subconsciously, and of itself. He represented a being of a different species from the rest: that was all. Yet than to be forced to live remote from one's kind nothing can be more terrible. A peasant transferred from, say, Taganrog to the Port of Petropavlovsk would still find a peasant like himself with whom to associate and make friends; so that, even before two hours had passed, he and his comrade would be inhabiting the same shelter or hut, and inhabiting it in perfect amity.

Dostoievsky, therefore, had no choice but to put up with his loneliness, and to concentrate his whole existence upon his inner life, upon the life of the emotions. "In spite of my hundreds of 'comrades,'" he writes, "I was terribly without a companion. Yet in the end I came to love my lack of a familiar, for, through this spiritual isolation, I gained an opportunity of reviewing my past life, of dis-

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secting it down to the pettiest detail, of probing my heretofore existence, and of judging myself strictly and inexorably. Indeed, I came even to bless Fate for having sent me this loneliness, in that, without it, I could never have arraigned myself, nor have made of my past career so stern a revision. And with what hopes did my heart beat at such moments ! As I thought things out, and decided one and another point, and swore to myself that my future career should be free from all those errors and failings which had marred it of yore, I sketched out a programme, and determined steadfastly to adhere to it. Nay, there even sprang to birth in me a blind belief that I should be *able* to adhere to it, and to do all that I was proposing for myself, and as I sat waiting and waiting I prayed that freedom might hasten its coming, so greatly did I long to make fresh trial of myself, and to plunge anew into the combat. To recall my then state of mind revolts me now ; but at the time I was full of a sullen impatience."

Indeed is it a terrible thing to feel oneself

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lonely among hundreds of companions—to find oneself without a single soul to whom one may communicate the confidences of an aching heart! And still more terrible is it to have to crush down constantly welling energy and constantly waxing impulses—to have to limit one's existence to introspection, and to memories of bygone errors, and to be forced to look ever upon the same frigid, monotonous surroundings! Yet it was thus that in those foul, murky prison wards, amid a circle of strangers who neither understood him nor trusted him, Dostoevsky, delving into the recesses of his soul, began increasingly to become permeated with a spirit of meekness which flowed irresistibly from a constant reading and re-reading of the Gospels, from a constant contemplation of a setting which, as he compared its strength with his own, irresistibly forced him to realize that he was a frail, insignificant individual.

Yes, it was the force of life—the force represented by those towering prison walls and the impossibility of surmounting them; the force represented by the severity and the

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immutability of rules framed by another ; the force capable of disposing of a man as it pleased, and without any regard to his personal volition, and heedless of any care for his personal happiness ; the force represented by the throng of branded convicts who refused to recognize him, or to believe in him, and denied him direct—it was these things in combination that ended by producing, and inevitably producing, upon Dostoievsky's personality the “toning-down” impression to which I have referred.

The fact that his prison existence insensibly tended to subdue his spirit led him, in his new frame of mind, also to pass judgment upon himself, his former pursuits, and his past activity, in that, of old, he had based that existence upon his own strength alone, upon obedience to his own will alone, upon a power to treat life in an imperious and authoritative manner.

In this repentance, in this recognition of the fact that the retribution which had overtaken him had come of his own errors and was deserved, he found a peculiar, yet a

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wholly intelligible, source of comfort that was not fatalism, but, rather, a logical deduction from the Christian dogma that man's personality is free, and therefore responsible. Through reading the Gospels, and nothing but the Gospels, and through seeing in himself a puny, isolated human being, Dostoievsky became humbler in spirit. But this stood far removed from mysticism. Indeed, all will concede that in the "Letters from a Dead House" there is not a suspicion of such a bent to be detected, even though between his release from prison and the writing of those "Letters" ten years elapsed. On the contrary, the "Letters" voice a surprisingly sane and sober view of mankind and of the demands of human nature.

From that time forth, therefore, Dostoievsky began both to preach and to practise humility and the denial of every imperious, persistent aspiration in life. "Life," said he, "is so great a thing that its depths are absolutely unfathomable. Not to you, poor, feeble, individual man, is it given to rebel against life, seeing that, unable to shape or to understand

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it, you stand in dense ignorance of its nature. What is it you seek? Your personal happiness? The satisfaction of your personal desires? Are you not already sufficiently well off? Would not anything further represent an increased slavery at the hands of your own passions? Before all things humble yourself: consider what your past life has been, consider what you may be able to effect in the future, consider how great a mass of meanness and pettiness and turpitude lies lurking at the bottom of your soul. Nor seek to approach the people with your own ideal of happiness, nor to fasten upon the people your own attributes; for, until you shall have earned its love and its goodwill and confidence, the people will refuse to know you or to trust you. Besides, are you capable of exercising such abnegation and unselfishness as shall merit in return the people's trust and affection?" The ruling *motifs* in Dostoievsky's purview had thus become, firstly, repression of the *ego*, and, secondly, humble service for others.

But to return to our story. In spite of

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Dostoievsky's new-found humility and self-flagellation, there still remained dormant in him his inexhaustible hunger for life. True, he called himself "a broken fragment"; yet he in no way looked upon himself as one; and though he had left behind him the existence beyond the Irtysh, he had not left behind him his every hope for the future. "Not for ever will this penal servitude last," had been his thought while in Siberia; "and as soon as ever I shall have recovered my liberty I intend to resume my writing. The only question is: will my friends have forgotten me, will they take me back into the Circle, seeing that it was I who left them, not they me?" On one occasion he even contrived to get a copy of some journal into his hands: and listen to the earnestness with which he dilates upon the incident: "I remember that I began reading the paper as soon as ever the 'barracks' had been locked up for the night, and that I continued my reading until daylight had broken. And ever, as item after item of intelligence from the outer world came fluttering to my eye, could I see, arising

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clearer and clearer before me, my past life. Constantly I strove to guess whether or not I stood far withdrawn from the life of the world, whether or not my friends had seen much of that life in my absence, whether or not anything was interesting them in particular. And to the same end I probed every word in the journal, I read between its every two lines, I endeavoured to discover hidden meanings in its every sentence, I searched its every page for obscure references to the old order of things, and I sought traces of what had been wont to stir mankind in my own day. Yet in the result there came to me only a sense of grief that my new life had so estranged me, and made of me such a broken fragment."

Meanwhile the years of his confinement passed away, until there arrived the last of them. "How impatiently I looked forward to the winter!" he writes. "How gladly I saw the end of summer—the time when the leaves are fading on the trees and the herbage is withering from the steppe—approaching!" (though usually that is a season whose advent

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persons in normal circumstances view with a measure of regret). "And when the long-looked-for winter did arrive, I noted the curious circumstance that, the nearer the date of my release approached, the more difficult did I find it to contain my soul in patience. In passing, I may remark that one result of the tendency to contemplation, of the unusedness to life, which is engendered by prison existence is that one comes to look upon liberty as a thing more absolutely free than is actually the case. However, on the eve of my last day in gaol I took a last walk around the prison boundary. It was here, here behind the prison buildings, that, on the first day of my confinement, I had roamed in loneliness and desolation and despair; and as I walked there now I remembered that on the day in question I had reckoned up the number of the coming days of my internment, and had found them to amount to over a thousand. Early next morning, also, before it was yet time to go to work, and before daylight had fully broken, I made a last tour of the wards, and took leave of my fellow-

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convicts. Many a gnarled, powerful hand was held out to me in farewell ; but though some of those hands pressed mine in friendly fashion, such hands were few, in that the majority of the prisoners realized that before long I should have become a totally different being from themselves. Hence, though they took leave of me civilly, and even kindly, it was not as of a comrade, but as of a *barin*. Some there were who even turned from me with a scowl, and refused to respond to my greeting ; while others threw me a glance of absolute hatred."

Nevertheless, the years of torture were now over. "Thank God for that!" cried Dostoievsky. "Before me there lay freedom, a new life, a veritable resurrection from the dead! What a glorious moment it was!"

Released on March 2, 1854, he was next posted, as a private, to the 7th Battalion of the Siberian Corps ; and on the following 1st of October he received promotion to the rank of ensign, and was then allowed to retire. Upon that he reopened correspondence with his friends and relations, and resumed his

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literary activity. It was in Siberia that he wrote both "Uncle's Dream" and "The Village of Stepantchikovo." It was in Siberia also that he thought out one of his finest books—namely, the "Letters from a Dead House."

V.

Dostoievsky's return from exile—His editorship of *Vremya* and *Epocha*—His second marriage—His sojourn abroad.

FROM the story of Dostoievsky's residence in Siberia when his term of penal servitude was ended I have omitted an episode which, though of no importance in itself, is nevertheless very characteristic. I refer to his courtship of Maria Dmitrievna Isaev, and to the subsequent marriage of the pair at Kuznetsky. In part we know who Maria was; but as to her personality nothing whatsoever is known. Although Dostoievsky left the prison ill (he had developed epilepsy), as well as was destitute of money, his hunger for life remained as strong as ever—so strong that he lost no time in falling in love. The attachment appears to have been the first real passion of his life; and, through the very

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fact, it evoked terrible pangs of disappointment and jealousy, in that Mademoiselle Isaev seems to have been a person by no means of an easy-going nature, but, on the contrary, a person of a nature as suspicious, as prone to jealousy, as self-tormenting, as Dostoievsky's own. Consequently we can easily imagine the mutual relations of the pair—more especially if we remember that at that period they were literally destitute, and that the circumstance was bound to augment their exacting dispositions. Yet Dostoievsky seems to have been capable at least of a certain unselfishness in his love. At all events, when one of their countless quarrels and estrangements had led to his future wife conceiving a passing fancy for another lover the following is what Dostolevsky writes to a certain Baron Wrangel, who (not very successfully) had undertaken—or, rather, had conceived the idea of undertaking—the rôle of mutual friend: “Cannot this matter” (the writer is referring to a grant of some pecuniary relief to his *fiancée*) “be arranged in favour of Maria Dmitrievna? In her present circumstances the

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sum would represent to her a fortune, and, as things stand, seems to constitute her only chance of escaping from her grievous position. The truth is that, since he " (the identity of that " he " is unknown) " possesses no more money than she does, I tremble lest she should marry before help can reach her." But after the quarrel the lovers became reconciled, and, a few months later, Dostoievsky writes to Wrangel: " Should no obstacle intervene, I purpose to marry her—you know whom—before Shrovetide. She still loves me, and has just said the word 'Yes.' What I wrote to you during the summer has in no way affected her attachment for me. Indeed, she soon wearied of her temporary attraction elsewhere, and, even before the summer had come to an end, her letters had permitted me to guess as much. Yes, all had become clear to me, in that never at any time has she concealed a single thing from my knowledge." Herein sounds the note of love triumphant; wherefore I repeat that the episode is eminently characteristic, even though Dostoievsky's biographies, as likewise his letters

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and memoirs, set it forth in the most fragmentary fashion. A curious feature is the circumstance that, whenever a rupture had occurred, all Dostoievsky's earnestness of passion could not prevent him from acting the part of a friend who was arranging for—at all events, concerning himself for—the welfare of a rival, even though a course of that kind could only react to the detriment of his own prospects. And that although his nature was not only passionate, but exceedingly prone to jealousy! The phase is full of complexity, and even Dostoievsky makes but scanty allusion to it in his novel "Demons." Of what, then, did it consist? Of self-sacrifice? Of psychopathic *fainéantise*? Rather, it consisted of that capacity for fantastic self-portraiture which Dostoievsky possessed to such an extraordinary degree—the capacity of some men for looking upon themselves as given characters, and then acting on the lines of the models conceived.

Yet beyond doubt Dostoievsky's passion was a genuine one. Later, in a letter to Wrangel of 1865, he thus describes his domestic life

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with Maria Dmitrievna : “ My wife, the being who adored me, and whom I loved beyond measure, expired at Moscow, whither she had removed a year before her death of consumption. I followed her thither, and never once throughout that winter left her bedside. Yet the end came on April 16th, and she passed away in full consciousness, and able to take leave of, and to remember, all (including yourself) to whom she wished to send her last greeting. Cherish her, I beg of you, as a fair and a goodly memory. My friend, she loved me beyond measure, and I returned her affection to a degree transcending all expression ; yet our joint life was not a happy one. Some day, when I meet you, I will tell you the whole story. But for the present let me confine myself to saying that, apart from the fact that we lived unhappily together (a circumstance due to her strangely suspicious, painfully fanciful nature), we should never have lost our mutual love for one another, but have become more attached in proportion to our misery. This may seem to you strange ; yet it is but the truth. She was the best, the

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noblest, women that ever I have known. For a year my heart had been torn by the spectacle of her slow decline, and to the full I had come to realize the true worth of what I was about to lay within the tomb; yet I should never have conceived that, when the earth lay heaped upon her coffin, there would have entered into my life such an aching void. Since then a year has elapsed: yet still that feeling has not lessened."

The term of penal servitude concluded, Dostoievsky lost no time in relapsing into the old rut of advance fees, impecuniosity, and literary bondage. But this time the relapse was due solely to necessity, for he had borrowed hundreds of roubles of Katkov, Kushelev, and others, and Plestchëev also had lent him a thousand—the whole to enable him to get away from Siberia. I repeat, therefore, that it was in vain for Dostoievsky (as subsequently it has been for others) to imagine that penal servitude had cured him of his spiritual sickness. Not for a moment will the theory hold water, even though hosts of words have been written upon the subject—Miller and Maikov

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(to name no others) having dilated upon it at length. The important point is that Dostoievsky remained as impatient, as rancorous, as hysterical, as self-diffident a mortal as before his exile. His oldest biography affords confirmation of this. In fact, not a particle of patience was now left to him. For instance, in Siberia he wrote odes after the manner of Karamzin, and poured forth lamentations; yet he remained as dreamy and inert as ever. Next, though he had received promotion to the rank of an officer, he retired from the army, migrated to Tver, removed thence to St. Petersburg, busied himself in many things, importuned a great number of people, began a score of new works, invented a new theme per moment, and eventually, in the winter of 1859, succeeded, through his own efforts and those of others, in landing in St. Petersburg with his wife and stepson.

Meanwhile, it might be well to note the character of the period—that is to say, of the sixties of the nineteenth century. That period saw much begun which we are now rounding off and finishing. It was then that the

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citizen first acquired *personality*—that is to say, acquired those qualities which embellish the individual and include free speech, free thought, and a free Press. True, as men of superior education and wider experience, we of the present day can afford to smile at these things ; but in the sixties of the past century the citizen was an idealist (albeit an idealist of a wholly mundane and earthy order), and therefore took for his principal aim the general happiness, for his principal interest the solution of practical questions and problems, for his principal aversion every species of metaphysical and scholastic thought, and for his principal tenet the dogma that “everything must attain perfection.” In short, the social ferment was prodigious, and everywhere there was to be seen in progress a general emancipation of the peasant, of the family, and of the citizen. Every one considered that he had a mission, if not to resolve matters, at all events to express his opinion upon them. Nor were themes for such expression of opinion by any means lacking, seeing that all persons stood agreed that the new life, the new prin-

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ciples, which the Throne had so boldly proclaimed, and had proclaimed with so profound a sense of their essential justice, were bound to initiate in Russian history a new era, a new period. Consequently whatsoever was old excited discontent, enmity, and disgust. The Russian, awaking from his agelong sleep, looked about him, and saw that he could move neither hand nor foot without encountering traditions "not of the best kind" and shortcomings both ancient and deep-rooted. Here, for instance, he could see dark ignorance; there he could see hypocrisy; there, again, he could see degradation of a kind calculated to sicken and shame his soul. Consequently work, and nothing but work, must be the order of the day. First the mountains of litter under which the freedom of man lay groaning must be removed, in order that, though too cowed and crushed to do anything effective on his own behalf, man might at least be heartened to make the effort. Thus, the main points sketched out, the self-appointed missionaries set to their task, and a thousand eager hands were stretched forth to help them. For all

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men believed, not only in the ultimate future, but in the immediate morrow. Never did the Russian of the day halt to draw breath or to reflect. Never did he closet himself in his study, or elaborate philosophical systems for justifying acts on a basis of general principles. Rather, permeated with a belief in the necessity of re-creating and reconstructing everything, and occupied to the full with the task of satisfying life's ever-increasing demands, he loved clear theories which, capable of universal assimilation, led straight, so to speak, to business. "Utility entails enlightenment," he would say to himself, and then proceed to fashion a picture of an order of life in which the most prominent site in every village should become occupied with a school wherein "a zealous and devoted preacher" should expound to his *alumni* the doctrine that they need fear no bugbear in the world save the darkness of ignorance and non-comprehension. Did women also crave to acquire learning? Then the Russian of the period at once exclaimed, "Let them learn!" and went on to project a scheme for a five-storied building wherein

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not only the rudiments of arithmetic, but also the higher mathematics, should be taught to all and sundry females who might take an interest in such matters. Least of all did the Russian of the period accept æsthetics, introspection, or philosophy, for his preference, rather, was for short rules whereby a swamp could be speedily drained, or a barren steppe turned into a fruitful field. Thus, through his everlasting pursuit of exclusively practical aims, the Russian of the day became a trifle *doctrinaire*, a trifle intolerant, a trifle pedantic, and wholly a bore. He cultivated only the useful, and never the original, and lightly-heartedly put away from him all thinking which might hinder his labour, or cause him, with rueful mien, to inquire into the purposes of life. "Why should I be an egoist?" he said to himself. "It follows that, when all is well with all, all will be well with *me*." And, this said, he sat him down to write, say, a treatise on ventilation. Yes, a sharp-spoken man was he, and from quarrels concerning free will, the root principle of principles, and so forth, he turned away with contempt.

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"Free will indeed!" he would exclaim. "Allow me a moment. A famine is raging in a certain province. Why is that famine raging? Because locusts have eaten up the local crops. And why have locusts eaten up the local crops? Because the local peasant has not a notion how to deal with the troublesome insects. And why has the local peasant not a notion how to deal with the troublesome insects? Because we, the *Intelligentsia*, go spending our time in studying Hegel and the like. The crying need is for work, and for nothing but work." And thus the Russian of the day, intoxicated with enthusiasm, ran hither and thither amid the hurly-burly of life.

The rôle which, in view of such an outlook upon existence, was bound to be assumed by Russian journalism is clear. Men lacked the leisure to survey the situation or to indite books. Life's movement was so swift that even the monthly publications could scarce meet their readers' demands for general reviews or synopses of affairs. Under the pressure of the social ferment, the old order of life had given

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way ; while the new system which was taking its place called for a new species of intelligence and a new set of principles. For this reason, to compose literary works to any extent, or to co-ordinate views, or to systematize opinions had become an impossibility ; and therefore journalism acquired a premier place in the activity of the Russian *Intelligentsia*. The more was this the case in that the practical character of such journalism closely approximated to the existing order of things. That is to say, while it could give the latest phase of the situation, the latest principles, it did not overlook life itself. Again, the practical character of such journalism caused polemics (and heated polemics at that !) to constitute a necessary factor of its journalistic existence, seeing that at every moment collisions occurred between personal egoism and personal interests. In short, journalism came to rule the roast, and therefore to adopt a philosophy of its own, a political creed of its own, and its own poetry and *belles-lettres*, until eventually it had become the hub of the wheel of intellectual thought in Russia.

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Naturally, from all this Dostoevsky did not stand aside, but, in conjunction with his brother, conceived a scheme for publishing a journal which, known as *Vremya*,¹ he edited for a space of two years. In the beginning the journal enjoyed a considerable measure of success; for, during its first year, it obtained two thousand subscribers, and, during its second, four thousand or more. Dostoevsky acted alike as editor and as contributor; and in either capacity he worked amazingly hard, seeing that, in addition to his invisible, but arduous, labours as editor, he wrote for the journal both "The Despised and the Rejected" and "Letters from a Dead House," as well as countless *critiques*, leading articles, and notes on foreign travel.

The three co-workers on the staff of *Vremya* (later, of the journal *Epocha*²)—I refer to Strakhov, Dostoevsky, and Grigoriev—were collectively known as the *Potchvenniki* or Nationalists. And concerning the nature of the Nationalism from which they derived their title a word may here be said. In essence

¹ The *Times*.

² The *Age*.

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it was an attempt to reconcile Slavophilism in Russian thought with Westernism. That is to say, it was an attempt to create an independent Russian outlook. While in no way inclining towards Panslavism, the *Potchvenniki* demanded for Russia an absolute hegemony, in that they claimed for her political and spiritual supremacy over all other races of Slavonic stock, and likewise borrowed from the Slavophiles the idea of the necessity of returning to those bases of mutual life whence, through excessive imitation of, through excessive flunkeyism and subservience before, Europe, the national life had become deflected. Yet not altogether did they reject European culture. All that they demanded was that such culture should not be allowed to crush out Russian originality, nor to be worked up into, to become, the organic element in Russian life. "Let European culture," they said, "be looked upon merely as a help towards a better expression of the independent spirit of Russia, and not as an end in itself. Russia is great; she is greatest of all in her moral and her intellectual aspect; she sur-

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passes all other States in that she alone represents the moral principle which is destined to reconcile the various contradictions of Western life, and to cause the superimposed Russian structure of culture to displace the culture of Europe. Of that moral principle the root basis is love, which constitutes a factor higher than all the world's political and economic phenomena put together. Hence, whilst making full use of European culture as a *means*, Russia ought never to forget that the true *end* is, not that she should become European, but that she should be aroused to a sense of that independence which, through her over-servility to Europe, has long remained comatose and submerged.

Owing principally to Dostoievsky's own literary contributions, *Vremya* enjoyed a considerable measure of success; but at last, owing to one of the strangest articles which ever appeared in Russian literature—I refer to Strakhov's article entitled "The Fateful Question"—it met with its downfall. Of this article no one could make head or tail; while, in addition, a considerable section of

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the public took offence at the article for the reason that it thought that it could detect therein an expression of antagonism to the Polish cause—and that although the *Viedomosti* of Moscow, for its part, accepted the article as a *profession de foi* in Poland's favour! In the result the Censorship stepped in and suppressed the journal.

Of his life at this period Dostoievsky writes as follows: "For a time I assisted my brother in the conduct of *Vremya*; and during that time all went well, for my "Dead House" created a perfect furore, and re-established for me my literary reputation. Indeed, though my brother had incurred considerable indebtedness when establishing the journal, his liabilities were beginning to be paid off when suddenly (in May 1863) the Censorship forbade further publication, on the ground of a warmly patriotic article which certain people had taken for an incitement to sedition. Of course, before long the affair was set in its proper light; but, meanwhile, the journal's suppression had to hold good. Next, my

¹ The *News*.

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brother applied for permission to continue publication under the title of *Epocha*; but since permission to do so was not granted before the end of February 1864, the first number of the journal could not appear before March 20th. Also, since no new subscribers materialized, we had to publish *Epocha* (late *Vremya*) at a subscription of only six roubles a year. Lastly, owing to anxiety on the score of fresh indebtedness, my brother began to fail in health, and I myself could not assist him, since I was forced to be in Moscow by the bedside of my dying wife. True, when I had buried her I hastened back to his side (he was now the only person left to me); but, three months later, after a serious illness of only a month, he went the same way that my wife had gone. All that he had had to bequeath was a sum of three hundred roubles; and these I applied to the expenses of his funeral. Yet his total indebtedness had reached twenty-five thousand roubles; and therefore his wife and family found themselves destitute and thrown upon the world without a crust. For myself, I

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represented the poor widow's only hope ; wherefore she came to me with her children, and begged of me to save her. I had loved my brother passionately. How could I deny her her request? So I decided what to do. I went straight to Moscow, and there begged of a rich old aunt of mine ten thousand roubles. With these I returned to St. Petersburg, and started another journal. But the journal's chances stood ruined in advance. To begin with, I found myself forced to obtain a fresh permit from the Censorship, and the matter dragged on so long that not until the end of August did the June number appear, and, meanwhile, the subscribers had taken offence ; while, to add to this, the Censorship would not allow my name to appear as editor or as publisher. Thus energetic measures were imperatively necessary. In the first place, I started to have the journal printed at three different presses, regardless of expense ; and, for another thing, I so disregarded my health and strength as to act as sole editor, to read all the proofs, to settle terms with contributors and the Censorship,

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to revise every article, to furnish whatsoever money was necessary, to sit up every night until six o'clock in the morning, and to sleep only five hours out of the twenty-four. By these means I succeeded in establishing a certain amount of system in the conduct of the journal. But I did so too late. By 1865 the number of our subscribers had fallen to thirteen hundred; and even at the present moment lack of funds is preventing me from publishing, and I have had to declare myself bankrupt. Sixteen thousand roubles I owe on note of hand, and five thousand on the security of my word alone. How thankful I should be if I could but return to penal servitude for a term sufficient to enable me to pay off my debts, and to let me feel myself free once more! I am writing another novel, and writing it under the lash, and of necessity, and against time. True, it will create a sensation when completed; but what good will that do me? Forced work, work done only to earn money, stifles and corrodes the faculties. Yet I must obtain at least three thousand roubles—though how it is going to be done I do

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not know. All I know is that if I do *not* obtain them I shall be ruined. Nothing but the merest chance can save me, for my stock of energy and resources is gone, and there remains to me only a sort of vague anxiety which approximates almost to despair. Anxiety, disappointment, a sense of chill foreboding—such is my normal, my only, condition. Yet still I cannot help thinking that great things in life await me. Is not that curious? Truly I must have the vitality of a cat ! ”

Thenceforth there began, in very truth, a great period—a period of great novels, a period of grim, spasmodic activity, a period of the production of a mass of ill-considered, hastily written stuff over which the writer’s unequalled genius casts fitful, lightning-like gleams.

In the summer of 1865 (that is to say, after the downfall of *Epocha* and the deaths of his brother and his first wife) Dostoievsky went abroad ; yet during that period even his distress of mind, his ill-health, and his troubles with his creditors could not prevent him from

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writing, by a wonderful achievement of genius, "Crime and Punishment," his greatest novel. The work met with a success truly marvellous. It was read and re-read by everybody, and few voices were to be heard raised in its disparagement. In it Dostoievsky makes a first change of theme, and produces, as his chief character, not one of "the despised and the rejected" but the type which thenceforth he preferred to every other—namely, the type of the Repentant Nihilist. That is to say, the Raskolnikov of the book is a masterful, imperious personality who imagines that he has a special, an exclusive, right to live, and to rebel against society, and to transgress its every law and moral precept and creed in the name of his own personal will, and of the demands of his own personal intellect. For this presumption Dostoievsky exacts a merciless penalty, since he forces his hero to commit a wholly gratuitous crime (the murder of Elizabeth), and then dispatches him to penal servitude. Says the author in effect: "The spirit of such a proud, arrogant 'intellectual'

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required to be cleansed : and inasmuch as the verity, the essence of life, lies in humility, such cleansing could come only of suffering." In other words, this is a work in which Dostoievsky expresses and explains himself *in extenso*. Nor does he seldom afterwards repeat the theme, but ever reiterates his scorn and detestation of an *Intelligentsia* which stood divorced alike from the people and from the Christian faith. Yet it is curious that Raskolnikov himself came of "the despised and the rejected." Why, then, did the author treat him hardly, and show him dislike, and subject him to the drastic healing of a term of penal servitude? In the first place, was not Raskolnikov ailing of body? In the second place, was not Raskolnikov poor? In the third place, was not Raskolnikov a man who stood isolated amid the harshness and the indifference of the life which encompassed him? Yet Dostoievsky consistently condemns him ; a score of times we see the fundamental *motif* of the novel repeated in the words : " The human personality is free, and therefore responsible. Sin presupposes punishment, and

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for that reason punishment is necessary, and imperatively necessary, for the accomplishment of moral purification." How, then, can we apply that theory to Dostoevsky's heroes, seeing that, almost without exception, they are psychopaths, and that Raskolnikov, in particular, is one? Before us passes a succession of hysterical and epileptic subjects; and, from the point of view of healthy thought, we understand that they need, first and foremost, a cure; yet Dostoevsky says with regard to such characters as Raskolnikov: "Away with you to penal servitude!" and then proceeds to put his remedy into force. In other words, with the aid of his artistic genius, and of a process of unconscious insight, the great novelist justifies his *criminals*; but upon his *madmen* he, though a theorist who advocates absolute individualism and freedom of will, passes sentences of condemnation! Thus it will be agreed that in no other work does Dostoevsky show such profundity of analysis, such marvellously artistic skill, but also such harsh injustice, as in this, his finest, novel.

In spite of the generous fees which he

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received for "Crime and Punishment," Dostoievsky still remained in a state of chronic impecuniosity. Thousands and thousands of roubles had to go towards the discharge of his debts ; and, for the same reason, no sooner had he brought one long novel to a conclusion than he started upon another. That is to say, he bound himself to slave for a publisher named Stellovsky, who paid him the sum of three thousand roubles for the right to publish Dostoievsky's existing works, and then bound him to write, by a given date and under penalty of a fine for breach of contract, an entirely new novel. But as soon as Dostoievsky had begun upon this work for Stellovsky he perceived that, should he act as his own amanuensis, the novel would never be completed in time ; wherefore he engaged as stenographer his future second wife, Anna Grigorievna, and started to dictate to her the work. Usually Anna Grigorievna attended at his rooms at about midday, and remained there until two or three o'clock, while Dostoievsky read over to himself what he had dictated the previous day, and then dictated

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to her a fresh instalment. In this manner three weeks' labour brought the story to a conclusion; and, on the principle that out of evil may come good, Dostoievsky effected an understanding with his secretary, and married her, after a few months' courtship, on February 15, 1867.

The next four years were spent abroad—mostly in Germany and Switzerland; nor need it be added that Dostoievsky's lack of means continued as chronic as before, seeing that, over and above the obligation of having to discharge his debts, he had to assist his late brother's family, to support his stepson, and so forth. For instance, in Geneva he found himself obliged to beg Ogarev for loans of five and ten francs apiece; and frequently his poverty reduced him to the necessity of pledging clothing, living in a single room, and so forth. And this in spite of the most strenuous work—work “at the rate of one huge novel a year”! In 1868 he wrote “The Idiot,” in 1869 “The Permanent Husband,” and in 1870 “Demons.” Yet his letters teem with complaints concerning his destitution, and

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he even mentions the fact that, once during the winter-time, his wife was forced to pawn her last woollen petticoat, and he his trousers, before the necessary two *thalers* for a telegram could be procured! Also he complains of illness, and of a despondency which "makes writing impossible." How despairingly he exclaims that "Do what I may, yes, do what I may, I cannot fill more than three and a half folios per year"! Terrible—a terrible plight!

In these letters we come also upon some curious details concerning his literary-creative process. "I have not before answered you," he writes, "for the reason that, literally without raising my head, I have been crouching over my novel for the *Russki Viestnik*.¹ So often had I made a mess of the thing, and so often had I been forced to re-write the story, that at length I registered a vow that, until I should have finished what I had set myself to do, I would not only eschew all other writing and reading, but also keep my eyes from glancing at anything else in the

¹ *Russian Messenger*.

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world. And that was but the beginning of things. They say that an artist's tone and style ought to form themselves; and such a statement is true: but sometimes both the one and the other elude one's grasp, and one has to go in search of them. In short, never have I accomplished aught without the most immense labour. At first (that is to say, at the close of last year) I looked upon my present work " ("Demons") "as a work which I was merely *torturing* into being, merely *composing*; so that I despised it; but suddenly there came to me a burst of true inspiration, and instantly I began to love the work, and to set about it with both hands, and to rescore all that I had written. Then during the summer there came another change; for upon the scene there appeared a new character, with a claim to be regarded as the true hero of the novel; so that my old hero had to retire into the background. In fact, I became so captivated with the new-comer that once more I recast the story."

But, unfortunately, all this had to be accomplished by a given date, and against time;

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wherefore, when the opening portion was already in the printer's hands, Dostoievsky "became panic-stricken, for the reason that I feared—feared greatly and torturingly—lest I had undertaken a theme beyond my strength." Again: "Oh, how I wish that I could write like Turgenev!" does he exclaim. In short, his lack of confidence in himself and his reputation was accompanied by painful misgivings as to dissatisfaction on the part of his employers; wherefore I repeat that the hidden, the terrible, tragedy of Dostoievsky's life lay principally in the fact that, through the abnormality, the unnaturalness, of his being forced to labour for hire, to sell his literary-creative faculty for cash, the marvellous productions of his genius suffered a grave and a gratuitous hurt. And to think that all his life he remained a slave, a journeyman, a literary proletarian! No wonder that despair seized him!

The years which he spent abroad were a period of tedium and monotony, for both husband and wife longed to be back in Russia, yet could not return thither because

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of their creditors. Meanwhile the only light and joy in their lives came of the birth of children, and of teaching the little ones to lisp, and to make their first essays in walking. But upon that followed the pain of laying those children in the tomb. "Ah, friend Apollon Nikolaievitch," writes Dostoevsky in a letter to Maikov of 1868, "I know that my love for my first little one seemed to you ridiculous, and that I expressed myself foolishly about it in my many letters to the many people who congratulated me, and that I looked absurd in those persons' eyes: yet to you, to you, I am not afraid to write my mind exactly as it is. That little creature of three months old, that little creature so frail and tiny, was to me a real personage, a real character. When it died it was just beginning to know me, and to love me; it would smile whenever I approached it. Also, whenever I started to sing to it in my ridiculous voice, it would listen to my songs as though it liked them; and never would it pucker or weep when I kissed it. Yet now folk tell me, for

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my comforting, that there will be other children ! . . . Where is my Sonia? Where is the little maiden for whom—yes, I do not hesitate to say it—I would have faced the torture of the cross if thereby I could have kept her alive? But enough of this. My wife is weeping. By to-morrow we shall have left our little grave and gone elsewhither.”

VI

Dostoevsky's fame

SINCE no escape from his pecuniary difficulties could be seen, and he felt that residence abroad was no longer endurable, Dostoevsky returned, in 1871, to St. Petersburg. Two years later he accepted Prince Mestchersky's invitation to become the editor of *Grazhdanin* ("The Citizen"), in return for a salary of two hundred roubles a month and additional fees ~~for~~ any articles which he might write; and in 1875 he wrote his novel "The Adult," and it appeared in "Notes of the Fatherland" of the same year. The latter fact is deserving of some attention, for it shows to what a height Dostoevsky's fame had attained, seeing that journals of the most opposite tendencies possible could thus agree to print his productions, and to print them gladly. Lastly, in 1876

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he began publication of his "Diary of a Writer."

For the time being, therefore, his financial circumstances—ever an essential factor in his career—underwent a marked improvement. For one thing, his wife undertook to obtain better terms for publishing his existing works, and thereby brought her husband in an annual income of from two to three thousand roubles ; while his fees from the journal also furnished a by no means despicable sum, seeing that for "The Adult" he received two hundred and fifty roubles per folio, and for "The Brothers Karamazov" three hundred roubles. Lastly, his "Diary of a Writer" provided a large return, in that by 1876 its subscribers had come to number 1,980, and the publication had also a retail sale of from two thousand to two thousand five hundred copies per issue, and certain issues necessitated a second, or even a third, edition. Next, by 1877 the number of subscribers had risen to three thousand, and a similar total of copies was being sold retail—one issue in particular (that of August 1880, which contained Dostoievsky's

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famous speech on Pushkin) having to be printed to the number of four thousand copies, yet being exhausted in a few days, and necessitating a second edition of two thousand copies, all of which disappeared as quickly as the first. Lastly, on the day of Dostoievsky's funeral procession and obsequies (in 1881), the final number of the "Diary," amounting to eight thousand copies, was sold out before the day had come to a close; and though six thousand additional copies were promptly issued, these too were bought up as swiftly as the first had been.

Thus we enter upon the period of Dostoievsky's mature and ever-growing renown. That renown attained its apogee when the *Russki Viestnik* printed and published his last and most famous novel, "The Brothers Karamazov"—a marvellous epic of human vileness, aberration, and psychopathy. For my own part, I consider it to constitute the finest of Dostoievsky's works, even though the majority of critics assign the palm either to "Crime and Punishment" or to the "Letters from a Dead House." At all events, in no

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other work does Dostoievsky attempt so wide a survey of life as he does here; and since he sets forth also his idiosyncrasies and his peculiar individuality to the fullest possible extent, the work may be said to constitute a testament which we may either accept or reject, but which we should do wrong not to value at its true worth. Upon it Dostoievsky himself set great store, and devoted ten anxious years to its intermittent composition. The first references to it are to be found in letters to Maikov of the years 1869-70. In one of these epistles Dostoievsky says: "The work is destined to be my last novel. Unless my memory plays me false as to former conversations between us, you used to commend the scope and the idea of 'War and Peace.' Well, this novel of mine is likewise to consist of five principal stories, though of stories so inter-divided that each one of them shall be purchasable separately. The first story will be published by Kashpirev, and its action is to be laid in the forties, while its title as a whole is to be 'The History of a Great Sinner,' and, in addition, it (like the remaining stories) is to bear a

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sub-title. The chief question to be propounded in the five stories will be the question which, consciously or unconsciously, I have been debating all my life—namely, the question of whether or not the Deity exists; and in the course of the book I intend its chief character to be, in turn, an atheist, a believer, a fanatic, and again an atheist. Of the second story the scene is to be laid in a monastery; and upon this portion of the work I pin my principal hopes, in that it may lead people to say that I have not *always* penned rubbish. Also, in this portion I intend to portray Tikhon Zadovsky—though, of course, under a different name; and, lastly, it is to contain an unpleasant, precocious boy of thirteen, the future hero of the work, who is to take part in the commission of a criminal offence, and then, for his correction and instruction, to be placed by his parents (well-to-do gentlefolk) in the monastery of the story. These two, Tikhon and the boy—there you see the chief characters.”

In this outline it is not difficult to recognize the future Karamazovs; nor is it difficult to discern the fact that Tikhon became Father

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Zosima, and the thirteen-year-old boy Alesha. Indeed, the detail that the boy is only thirteen in itself constitutes a hint at that "Karamazovism," that foul heredity, which, transmitting its taint of lust to the child, is destined to mar him from the cradle onwards. Again, Dostoievsky's painful doubts concerning the existence of the Deity are to be seen embodied in Ivan Karamazov: and certainly never did an atheist descend to such depths of scepticism and self-analysis as are introduced into the fantasy of the Great Inquisitor.

I have said that Dostoievsky himself set great store by this novel; and, indeed, the idea of it represents his own mental attitude, so that, right or wrong, the book is Dostoievsky, and Dostoievsky unabridged. But the important point is its psychopathological aspect. The book portrays victims of hallucination, mystics, hysterical subjects, sufferers from mania, epileptics, moral automata, and men of revolting depravity; and to this terrible picture, to this sort of general demoniacal possession, it affixes, as a background, the foul heredity which is connoted by the term "Karamazovism." In

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fact, in the work we see incarnated Dostoevsky's two favourite theories that "man is by nature a despot, and loves to torture," and that "tyranny is constituted of custom developed into an insistent demand."

But, setting aside details, let us try to return a brief answer to the question, What is "Karamazovism"? "Karamazovism" may be regarded from two points of view—from the point of view of science, and from the point of view of Dostoevsky himself. In the former case it constitutes an hereditary taint afflicting a whole family; in the latter case it constitutes a man's sin incarnated in father and sons—that is to say, in two generations. Almost every one in the book is permeated with vice. Even the hysterical, the fifteen-year-old Liza "offers herself" to Ivan Karamazov. But more important than such physical turpitude is the *spiritual* turpitude of the characters; and in this respect the author lavishes his colours unstintedly, and, true to himself, groups the whole phase under the one phenomenon negation. That is to say, everything in life is *denied* by the Karamazovs—the family,

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the community, morality, faith, God Himself. The elder Karamazov is not only a debauchee and a sensualist : he is also an atheist. Again, while Ivan seeks painfully for the truth amid a sea of agonizing doubt, Alesha thinks, but is not sure, that he has found the truth in a monastery, and even the foolish Madame Chochlakov experiences (though only in a sort of dull, infantile, senile fashion) the Divine influence. In short, from the soul of every Karamazov God is absent ; wherefore every Karamazov is not only a degenerate, but also a spiritual sinner in deed or *in spe*. And of this want of faith there comes all the evil in their lives, all the confusion of their thought, all the enslavement of their bodies, all the unsoundness, the distortion, of their miserable souls. The father is a worn-out cynic, sensualist, and blasphemer, and goes to the tomb with his lust still unsatisfied ; while, instinctively realizing that nothing but the faith can save them, the other Karamazovs (all except Dmitri) search for it. Yet, whether they were destined to find it we do not know, for the novel stands unfinished, and even the two exist-

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ing parts constitute no more than the preamble to a grandiose epic on the subject of Atheism in search of Truth. Yet to a certain extent we can *divine* the projected sequel. In the person of Father Zosima Dostoevsky has asserted that from spiritual doubt there exists a way of escape, and that of the barren life of general unbelief there comes spiritual confusion. During his life in the world Zosima has been a sinner like the rest—he has run wild, and squandered money acquired through the toil of another, and raised his hand against his fellow ; but in repentance, in gnawings of conscience, he has found a new and inward strength, and that strength, overcoming vice, has regenerated him throughout. The strength in question, says the author, is the strength of love and of humility ; but, above all things, it is the strength of humility. Yet, though Zosima has entered a monastery, he has not wholly renounced the world, nor chosen the grim path of asceticism. Rather, he has forgotten himself, and become the benefactor of others, in that the faith, the pure Christian faith, has settled in his soul, and the world

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has ceased to touch him, save in the person of those persons "weary and heavy-laden" to whom he ministers in the spirit of love and truth. Hence the soft, equable light which the figure of the priest diffuses over the pages of a novel which, otherwise, sets forth with intense vividness all the pangs, all the troubles of life and of the human soul. Says Dostoievsky: "The issue from 'Karamazovism' is by the road of personal regeneration through humility and renunciation of one's *ego*, though not of one's kind."

For three years the final elaboration of "The Brothers Karamazov" withdrew Dostoievsky from activity as a publicist. Yet never did he lose the idea of resuming that activity, since his impressionable nature was too prone to take fire at the least trifle not to yearn to participate in the acrimonious discussions of the day. In 1881 he resumed publication of the "Diary," but died before the last proofs had been corrected. The more importance is to be attached to his labours as a publicist in that, through them, he exercised an immense influence upon public opinion.

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In the "Diary" we come across many contradictions, much confusion of thought, and some curious reflections on men and things. But in general it has a perfectly definite tendency, and voices not a little clear and fundamental thinking. Indeed, precisely speaking, its gospel is the old gospel of the *Potchvenniki*, but expounded in a more incisive form. As before, Dostoievsky inveighs against the "servile," the "flunkeyish," attitude of Russia towards Europe, and casts about for a basis for Russian independence. That basis, he says, must be constituted, firstly, of the spirit of the people and, secondly, of popular adoption of Orthodox-Christian ideals. Such a basis, he declares, exists already, for Russia is morally superior to Europe, and therefore ought to wield an hegemony over the civilization of Europe. The same with regard to foreign policy. Not infrequently, indeed, Dostoievsky lapses into Chauvinism. "What new things can Russia give the world?" he asks. "She can give it democracy and moral principles of life. Every Russian is at heart a thorough-going democrat, and moral

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principles are our exclusive possession ; whereas Europe is ruled by ideas of class and historic right, and for the same reason has come to be a corpse without life or motion. Also, Russia has resolved the chief contradictions of life at a stroke. At a stroke she has resolved them through the moral agency of love. Of that there is proof in her emancipation of the peasants from the soil—a step representing not only a piece of political wisdom, a prophylactic against the proletariat, but also something great, something moral, in itself, in that it exemplifies application of the principle of love to the people.”

Naturally, such ideas—especially in view of the mordant and didactic form in which they were expressed, as well as of their interspersion with such statements as that Constantinople was destined very shortly to become Russian—were calculated to excite feelings of rather a mixed character. But to engage in a polemic with Dostoievsky would here be out of place ; wherefore let us pass over his paradoxes and his Chauvinistic utterances, and apply ourselves, rather, to the equally interesting ques-

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tion of why such an artist came to engage in the publicist business at all. That he had many excellent ideas there can be no doubt; as also there can be no doubt that those ideas lacked any sort of a system, and were united by no definite programme. Dostoievsky himself acknowledges their fortuitous, disjointed character. "Whenever I sit down to my 'Diary,'" he writes, "I find myself saddled with from ten to fifteen subjects. Yet always I have to defer those which interest me most, since one thing leads to another, and I grow excited, and there gets jotted down more than I had at first intended. And, would you believe it, but even yet I have not decided what form the 'Diary' is to take; nor have I the slightest notion as to whether or not I shall contrive to keep it going for two years! However, were nothing to come of all these valuable (though fleeting) impressions, I should be indeed sorry!" As a matter of fact, his object in writing the "Diary" was to delve into the vital questions of the day, to study them in detail, and to propound them in a great novel. Consequently he took a special interest in such

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subjects as the younger generation of Russia, the family, and so forth, since the "Diary" represented so much literary material for the future, and facts, impressions, ideas—all needed to be set down before they should escape his memory. At one moment he is seen advocating a new curriculum for students; at another moment penning a bright and optimistic study of contemporary Russian youth; at a third suggesting the foundation of a reformatory or training colony for young criminals. In short, scattered throughout the pages of the "Diary" are many and varied ideas: and great indeed must have been his reputation, in that such a rough-hewn, haphazard publication should have exercised upon its innumerable readers the immense influence which it did!

Thus the "Diary of a Writer" enjoyed great popularity; and with the issue of each new number (every copy of which found a ready sale) there grew and increased the fame of its author. Indeed, that there was a time when the majority of Dostoievsky's compatriots looked upon him as the most prominent

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feature of Russian life, as its prophet and apostle, there can be no doubt. Lastly, with the appearance of "The Brothers Karamazov," and, still more, with the delivery of his speech on Pushkin, his fame attained its apogee. Of the fact Dostoievsky himself was conscious, for only now, after a literary career of thirty years, did he lose his torturing distrust of himself and his powers. "My name alone is worth a million roubles," was a remark made with a touch of vanity, but also with perfect truth. In short, the knowledge of the transports which he aroused in his innumerable readers, of the faith which was reposed in him by his countless worshippers, had at length brought peace to the hyper-sensitive soul which life had so mercilessly harrowed. Yet could even this atone for the misfortunes which had befallen him during his career? We shall do well to recall the principal stages of the latter, if only for the purpose of experiencing the shudders which they will arouse. In the first place came his troubled youth, with its ceaseless, ever-insistent thoughts on the subject of suicide, and the

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painfully suspicious attitude which he maintained towards himself and his fellows. It was a youth destitute of love and faith, a youth filled with despair and melancholy, a youth haunted with a constant, yet ever-elusive, vision of fame, a youth clenched in the grim vice of material servitude and dependence. Also his ardent imagination used to picture to his vision a future of poverty and homelessness, an unhealthy misanthropy poisoned his every pleasure, and made him repellent to all, and his weakness of volition laid him so entirely open to passing whims that he became the slave of his own fancies, while fully understanding the horror of such servitude. Such was Dostoievsky's youth ! And to it there succeeded the term of penal servitude, several long, grievous years of waiting, and a ceaseless struggle with an insatiable, irrepressible hunger for life. And when at length there ensued the glorious moment of release it proved a moment spoiled by material difficulties, even as Dostoievsky's later raptures of literary creation were spoiled through the fact of his genius having to slave for money, and to wring and

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torture itself over long-drawn novels, in the effort to make both ends meet. Only at long last came there relief from the agony, when toil and tribulation and suffering had at length brought forth fame and affluence and tranquillity of soul and the power to enjoy those blessings in ease and comfort. For not only was Dostoievsky now recognized, not only was he now placed by the side of Turgenev and Tolstoy: he was also *trusted*, he was also afforded the highest gratification to which an author can aspire—namely, the power of ruling public opinion. Thus, a different life having opened for him, he grew calmer and more assured, and the very tone of his writings shows a change. In it we see an increased evenness—an evenness born of a consciousness of strength and the removal of incitements to nervous irritability; in it we see reflected a gentler frame of mind. Hence I repeat that Dostoievsky did not in vain attain renown: and this is a result at which every student who is acquainted with the circumstances of the writer's troubled life will experience a thrill of moral satisfaction.

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For a few moments let us return to the "Diary." Among matters which particularly interested Dostoievsky were processes of law, the position of women in Russia, and the struggle for Slavonic emancipation. Above all things he was a warm and consistent upholder of the feminine movement; and in his "Diary" for May 1876 we find him triumphantly proclaiming that "our Russian womanhood constitutes our one hope, our one pledge, of regeneration." Also he writes: "There can be no doubt that during the last twenty years the lot of the Russian woman has undergone a vast improvement. This is because from the first her participation in contemporary questions has been lofty, fearless, and frank—it has been participation of a kind calculated to inspire respect, and to force our people to think. To every obstacle, to every jeer, the Russian woman has opposed supreme contempt. Proudly she has averred her desire to share in the work of the State, and to set about the same, not only with disinterestedness, but also with self-denial. In short, whereas, during the last few decades,

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the male citizen of Russia has yielded to excesses of greed and cynicism and materialism, the Russian woman has rested proudly true to the pure worship, the pure service, of her ideal. Lastly, in her hunger for the higher education she has displayed a measure of patience and responsibility which has set before her fellows an example of splendid heroism."

Consequently, that Dostoievsky received much court at the hands of women is not to be wondered at. They gathered in his rooms for purposes of conversation, mutual intercourse, and counsel. They wrote him letters revealing the most intimate circumstances of their lives; they requested of him guidance at various junctures. At that period he happened to be overwhelmed with work, both in connection with the publication of the "Diary" and in connection with the revision of "The Brothers Karamazov," and thus had little time to spare: yet always he would snatch a moment or two to engage in conversation with these ladies, and to do his best to reply to their innumerable letters and in-

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quiries. Also he undertook more than one errand or commission. For instance, when a lady correspondent informed him that, come what might, she must obtain a course of study, and that for the purpose she had left her father and her betrothed (the latter of whom she did not love), Dostoievsky begged on her behalf the protection of an influential dame, and also advised her to be more careful in her conduct for the future. "For you, with your temperament, it is not possible to become a merchant's wife. Yet to fill the place of a good wife and mother is the highest destiny to which woman can aspire. This, of course, you know for yourself; wherefore I will say no more concerning the young man to whom you have alluded than to observe that the fact that you do not love him means *everything*, since to no end whatsoever should a woman mutilate her life. If there be no love, there should be no marriage. Write to me again should you feel so minded." And other replies of Dostoievsky's are equally sympathetic, gentle, and frank. For instance, he expresses regret that a lady correspondent has

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failed to pass an examination in geography, and endeavours to revive her drooping spirits. "At your jejune age," he writes, "it is wrong and unforgivable to be so impatient, so wanting in resignation, as to say that you will 'never succeed in anything.' As yet you are but a beginner—you have not yet earned the right to speak as you do; for perseverance may enable you to succeed in much, seeing that in spite of a certain tendency to waywardness and frivolity, you seem to possess both common sense and courage. Do not be angry with me for this plain speaking, but give me your hand and be comforted. My God! who does *not* meet with failure?" Lastly, he blesses a certain lady for her enterprise in proceeding to Servia as a Sister of Mercy; and, in general, it may be said that these letters reveal a large measure of sympathy, and not a little spice of animation.

With regard also to legal processes, Dostoevsky's interest was that of a social worker; and it was mainly owing to his efforts and influence—in fact, to the series of articles which he indited on the subject—that Madame

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Kornilov's innocence was re-established, and her conviction annulled. But his real apotheosis came with the Pushkin festival. In fact, the occasion constituted a meed of homage to Dostoievsky's greatness more even than it did to that of Pushkin. Hear, for instance, what Strakhov has to say on the subject: "As soon as Thedor Mikhailovitch began to speak the hall trembled with applause, and then became absolutely still. True, his speech was read from a manuscript, but it constituted less a written oration than a living, a direct, a sincere utterance from the heart. And to it we listened as though until that moment Pushkin had never even been mentioned. The inspiration, the naturalness which ever distinguished Dostoievsky's style he imparted in full measure to his reading; and though I will not say more concerning the subject-matter of the oration than that it communicated to that reading an added impressiveness, I may add the remark that to this day I can hear floating over the heads of the great, silent multitude the tense, sympathetically uttered words: 'Humble thyself, thou man

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of pride! Set thy hand to labour, thou man of leisure!’ To any one who did not witness the furore of applause which broke forth on the conclusion of the speech the scene in the hall would seem inconceivable and beyond all probability; but, as a matter of fact, the crowd had long been charged with enthusiasm—for a long time it had been venting its feelings upon every conceivable point, every resonant phrase, every full-throated line which gave it a chance. And now, as it gazed upon the man whose enthusiasm equalled its own, as it realized that there had been delivered an oration which merited raptures the most boundless, it burst into an unanimous storm of approval. All pressed forward to acclaim Dostoievsky, and a few even broke the rules by leaping from the body of the hall on to the platform; while one young man, they say, fell in a swoon at the orator’s feet. In short, every one was overcome with a wave of emotion, and alike on the platform and in the ‘green room’ (whither we retired during the interval) were all in ecstasies of delight, and carried out of themselves by their desire

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to do honour to their hero. Said Aksakov to Dostoievsky: 'This day you have delivered a speech which entails upon Turgenev, as the representative of the Westerners, and upon myself, as the representative (if I may say so?) of the Slavophiles, the duty of expressing to you our joint sympathy and our joint gratitude.' No similar demonstration can I remember; and in particular does there come back to me the manner in which P. V. Annenkov approached me, and cried like a man inspired: "See what may come of an appreciation by a true artist and genius! Dostoievsky has decided the matter at a stroke!" " " "

In conclusion, let us speak of Dostoievsky's closing days and of his obsequies. This can best be done with the aid of memoirs compiled by eye-witnesses.

Ten days before the brief illness which carried Thedor Mikhailovitch to the tomb Miller went to remind him of a promise to participate in a "Pushkin evening" which had been arranged for January 29th (the anniversary of Pushkin's death). Though well aware

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that Dostoievsky looked upon an uninvited guest as some one worse than the devil himself, Miller had for the moment forgotten the fact, as also that Thedor Mikhailovitch was particularly busy in the task of publishing the January issue of his recently resumed "Diary of a Writer." Nevertheless, Dostoievsky came running out of the anteroom to greet his visitor, and explained to him that he was greatly perturbed lest the Censorship should elect to delete certain lines destined to embody in a few words the theme which the "Diary" was to develop during the coming year. "Should the Censorship decline to let those lines through," cried Dostoievsky, "all will be lost!" The reason for this was that, since Dostoievsky possessed no means of depositing security, he could publish his "Diary" only after each number had been revised by the authorities. Probably the immediate source of the trouble was the lines with which he opens the fifth section of the first chapter of his "Diary," under the heading of "Let the people speak, and meanwhile let us watch and learn." The

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lines run thus: "Therefore let our password be 'Trust the people.' And, indeed, that may be done with safety, for the Russian people is worthy of trust. Therefore summon the Grey Smocks,¹ and inquire of them their needs, and what they consider indispensable ; and when that has been done you will be told the truth—and possibly it will be the first time that you will have heard it."

Next day Miller was informed that Dostoievsky had suddenly ruptured a pulmonary artery ; whereupon he hastened to Anna Grigorievna, since he feared lest it might be the conversation of the previous day that had worked the patient harm. But to his relief it turned out that it was discussions subsequent to his own with Thedor Mikhailovitch that had caused the latter to become excited to the point of experiencing a recurrence of the malady—an aftermath of catarrh of the wind passages—which had been undermining his system for the past eight years. Yet the fatal

¹ The peasants.

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issue came, not of that malady but of an arterial rupture which no one could have foreseen. Either on the 25th or the 26th of January the beginning of the last illness showed itself in the form of a slight bleeding from the nose, to which Thedor Mikhailovitch paid no attention. Indeed, so little indisposed did he feel that he refused to allow a doctor to be summoned; and it was only when, about four o'clock, there set in also a flow of blood from the throat that von Breitzel, Dostoievsky's regular medical attendant, was sent for. And the doctor was still in the house when there took place a second, and a still more violent, flow of blood, and the patient fainted; whereafter, when consciousness returned, he expressed a wish to receive Absolution and the Sacrament, and, while awaiting the priest, took leave of his wife and children, and blessed them. Next, when the Sacrament had been administered, he felt better, and on the 27th, there having occurred no repetition of the flow of blood, he began to feel almost recovered. In

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the meanwhile his mind had been greatly exercised by the thought that the "Diary" was due to appear on the 31st; wherefore he now begged Anna Grigorievna to examine, and also to correct, some proofs which had just arrived, and then to read aloud to him the newspapers of the day. Thus until noon on the 28th all went well; but at that hour blood again began to flow, and Thedor Mikhailovitch to grow rapidly weaker. Meanwhile Maikov had daily been coming to see him, and had spent each forenoon in the task of assisting the household in the duties of the sick-room. From Anna Grigorievna herself we know that at solemn moments it was ever Dostoievsky's custom to open, at hap-hazard, the copy of the Testament which he had had with him in prison, and to scan the first few lines wheresoever the pages might separate. And this he did now, and then handed the volume to his wife for the passage to be read aloud. The passage was the following: "But John restrained Him, saying, I have need to

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be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me? Jesus answered him, and said, Restrain Me not, for unto us it hath been committed to fulfil a great truth." Anna Grigorievna finished reading the passage, and then Dostoevsky said to her: "Did you mark the words, 'Restrain Me not'? They mean that I am about to die." And he closed the book. Nor was the presentiment wrong. Two hours before the end came he requested the copy of the Testament to be handed to his son Theda; and when, after dinner, Maikov and his wife returned to the sick-room, there took place, in their presence, at about half-past six o'clock, another and a final outflow of blood, coupled with a relapse into unconsciousness and the beginning of the death-throes. At once Madame Maikov ran for another doctor, and returned with N. P. Tcherepnin, whom she had found at the house of a friend of his; but by the time that Tcherepnin had arrived the end was imminent, and he could do no more than sit listening to Dostoevsky's expiring heart-

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beats. A little earlier B. M. Markevitch also had arrived ; and in the *Russki Viestnik* for February 1881 there is to be found his description of the last moments in the death chamber. Thus at twenty-two minutes to nine o'clock on the evening of January 28, 1881, there passed away Thedor Mikhaïlovitch Dostoievsky.

Of his funeral it may be said that it presented a spectacle which caused general amazement. So large a concourse of people, such a multitude of cordial manifestations of respect and sympathy, exceeded the expectations even of his warmest admirers. In fact, never before had such a funeral pageant been seen in Russia. Of that clear evidence is afforded by the statistics alone ; for in the funeral procession which escorted the body from the flat (No. 5 in the Kuznetchni Perëulok) to the Church of the Holy Ghost in the Nevskaia Lavra there were borne sixty-seven wreaths, and there marched, fifteen choirs—each wreath representing a deputation, an association, a society, or an institution which desired to

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do honour to the dead writer, and each choir representing a circle or a department which had succeeded in mustering a band of singers. Truly it is a problem of some magnitude to conceive how such a vast demonstration can have come to assemble ; but clearly it must have materialized spontaneously, and without any preliminary agitation, preparation, agreement, or arrangement, since no one had been expecting Dostoevsky's death, and the interval of three days between that unlooked-for event and the funeral was too short for any extensive organization to have been effected. Consequently almost every one of those sixty-seven deputations had its own special significance, its own special importance, as a recognition of the deceased author's greatness.

VII

SUMMARY—What has Dostoievsky given us?—The type of the “Repentant Intellectual”—Aloofness from the people—Dostoievsky’s intangible force.

WHAT did Dostoievsky give us as a *littérateur* and as a social worker? Let us try to answer that question *sine ira et studio*, while first remarking that the question introduces us also to the difficult subject of Dostoievsky’s ideas. Though first and foremost an artist, he displayed a consistent leaning towards propaganda by pamphlet and the polemics of the day; and even some of his novels and other works —“ Demons ” is an example—evince a marked tendency in the same direction, and conceal under narrative form a homily. Consequently, even if he had never written the “ Diary of a Writer,” his ideas could still have been gauged. At one moment he proclaims that

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Constantinople is bound to become Russian, and that the time is arrived when Russia ought to occupy the Ottoman Empire; while at another moment he asserts that the consummation of European culture is peculiarly the task of Russia. Naturally, such opinions pleased not a few of his compatriots; but neither upon them nor upon other views of his concerning the mutual relations of Russia and of Europe need we now dwell, for the reason that enough has been said on the subject in the two preceding chapters.

So turn we to another aspect of his views—the aspect in which he speaks of the people and of the *Intelligentsia*, and thinks of them, and suffers on their behalf. Even had he no other claim to immortality, even had he not also been a great artist and a great psychopathologist, he would still have earned a claim through his attitude towards the people. The tendency to sympathize with, to stand up for, to champion the masses appeared in him at a very early age; and that attitude grew, and became particularly prominent, at the time of his association with Durov's circle. Frequently

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he spoke of the horrors of Serf Law; frequently he denounced the latter as a foul and revolting phenomenon of Russian life. Yet the figure of the enslaved peasant was, for him, only one of many embodiments of the vast, murky flood of misery and degradation which drags its cruel, turbulent length over the landscape of life. A man of exceedingly sensitive nature, he found that the misfortunes of others hurt and distressed him to a degree that was sheerly painful. Never, also, could he endure the least violence, even though he asserted every man to have in him a tendency to tyrannize. Certainly he himself never tyrannized, for his character had in it not a shadow of cruelty, and he was wont to remark that "all of us come of Gogol's 'Cloak.'"¹ It was from this clearly expressed sympathy with "the despised and the rejected," therefore, that there originated the first beginnings of his

¹ The title of one of Gogol's shorter stories—the story of a poor, half-starved public servant who, after years of saving, scrapes together the wherewithal to buy a cloak, but has it stolen from him on the first day of his wearing it, and dies of the disappointment.

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literary activity. To imagine that the sufferings of (for example) Sonia Marmeladov were either necessary or just never for a moment entered into his head. On the contrary, he branded traffic in human flesh as no previous writer of the day had done. True, he preached also humility, and recognized that, under certain circumstances, suffering might prove of benefit: but to whom might it prove of benefit? Only to the proud "intellectual" who, before all things, considered himself entitled to order and to reconstruct his life according to his own devices: only to him did Dostoievsky say: "Humble thyself, thou man of pride!"

In the great movement of all that was best in Russian literature and Russian intellectualism—in the tendency to draw nearer to the masses, and to preach the now recognized idea that without the people, in disregard of the people, nothing useful can be effected—Dostoievsky played a large and, in my opinion, an exceedingly fruitful part, both through his pamphlets and through certain of his larger works. True, some of his mystical notions we

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may not altogether share, nor may they so attract us as to prevent us from seeing that his nervous, hysterical temperament constantly brought him into conflict with himself, and led him to enunciate such dull paradoxes as that the people naturally tends towards suffering ; yet still it may be said that Dostoievsky's outlook, when shorn of its mystical and Chauvinistic angularities, was so clear and simple as to be intelligible to every thinking person. Of that outlook the corner-stone was the people—the people dirty, degraded, and noisome, yet retaining in the depths of its soul its lofty instinct for truth. Without the people, in forgetfulness of the people, there could result no true life, no genuine activity ; and herein Dostoievsky, though wayward in much, marched with the best minds in the intellectual world of Russia. In brief, his attitude towards the masses was one of guarded affection. An instance of this is seen in the episode of the peasant Marei ; and to Dostoievsky's corner-stone of love for the people both Russian literature and the Russian *Intelligentsia* owe a great future, and a future wherein the name

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of Dostoievsky—himself an “intellectual,” if not one of the leaders of the intellectual world—will never be forgotten. But precisely what is the Russian *Intelligentsia*? In answer to that question I propose to quote an extract which, though somewhat crude in form and extravagant of phrase, will yet give us an idea of the essence of the matter. The extract is a speech addressed by one character in a story to another.

“ I tell you that the *Intelligentsia* of Russia is the best, and possesses the most pleasing qualities, of any in the world. You may travel the whole world over, yet you will find nothing to resemble it, for it constitutes a sumptuous jewel which, though insufficiently valued, is striking in its beauty. And the life-essence of that *Intelligentsia* is its sensitiveness of conscience. Go whither you will—to America, to France, to England, even to Patagonia. Preach there the tenets that personal happiness is unlawful, and that love, egoism, and the like are sins. Every one will turn away from you, and folk will cry out: ‘ How can personal happiness be unlawful? ’ ‘ After this,

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what is lawful?' But *the Russian intellectual* will understand you; *he* will reach out to you in soul. And why so? Because, from the moment of his arising in the morning, he feels gnawings and reproaches of conscience, and falls to thinking in a philosophic manner. For instance, should he take a crust of bread into his hands, there will present itself to his vision a picture of life as lived on the Plantations. 'Grain—a commodity worked by slaves!' he will say to himself; and straightway that crust will become for him a thing of bitterness. Or, should he fall in love, at once he will see arise before him a picture of his degraded 'lesser brother' selling his human dignity for a groat; and the spectacle will cause that intellectual to behold love as a thing shorn of all its glamour. Yes, the intellectual hungers for the people, he seeks a road whereby he may draw nearer to it, and become one with the great silent masses which for a thousand years have borne Russian-history upon their backs. For, apart from the people, destitute of a childlike, unsophisticated, mystical love for the people,

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the Russian intellectual cannot exist. For example, look at what he is now doing. Look at all the care and conscientiousness with which he is for ever pursuing his quest for the truth in general, and for the truth which lies enshrined in the peasantry, the populace, in particular, while rejecting those things which constitute the pride and the joy of the ordinary mortal. And the sources from which our *Intelligentsia* receives, and has always received, its recruits are the villages, the marshes, and the black-loam plains of Russia; and it is owing to that fact that our *Intelligentsia* possesses a conscience, and that it feels ashamed to live in forgetfulness of the peasant. For it is from the peasant that our *Intelligentsia* has borrowed its *formula* of 'Life according to Truth' (as distinguished from life according to rule and to doctrine); and if, in the West, science and the recognition of necessity (juridical or historical) rule the roast, that is a matter of no moment. In Russia *love* rules—we believe in love as in a mysterious force which can at a blow

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shatter every barrier, and establish a new life which shall be devoid of all 'out-growths of economic contradictions.' For in head and in heart every Russian intellectual cherishes an image of that life. If anything has ever brought us true inspiration, it has been that idea of a life on lines of justice, a life founded upon love for one's neighbour, a life which shall recognize no *formulæ* save those dictated by the heart."

In this, then, we see at least one form of that Russian cult of the people to which Dostoievsky accorded his enthusiastic adherence. The people, the "intellectual" divorced from the people—herein lay the contradiction which most pained and interested the great novelist. To the "intellectual" aloof from the masses he showed himself absolutely merciless; he strove ever to pillory him in the most odious of guises (in "Demons," for example), and demanded of him, not only repentance, but also expiation through suffering. Penal servitude alone could open Raskolnikov's heart. Before such a result could come about it was necessary,

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even indispensable, to impose upon him bondage. Yet wherein lay Raskolnikov's fault? In the fact that from first to last he had been proud with a pride that was compounded alike of arrogance of personal thought, of presumption of personal sentiment, and of insistence of personal will. To correct this fault punishment was needed, pain was needed, since before all things the man required to humble himself, if ever he was to understand that he was not alone in life, that his personal happiness was not essential to the world, and that he had no right to expect that it should become so. In Dostoievsky's view, Raskolnikov was culpable in that he looked upon freedom as mere licence to desire, mere right and opportunity to do, whatsoever he pleased, and that he envisaged the idea of equality only in the form of envy of those who possessed more than he did. For Dostoievsky, freedom and equality were great things; but they were not great as they were understood by Raskolnikov. "True freedom," said Dostoievsky, "is such an overcoming of

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the will that at length one may attain to a moral condition wherein one shall always, and under every circumstance, and in very deed and truth, possess the mastery over oneself." Nor, with him, did equality connote envy, a desire to take away from another what oneself did not happen to possess. Rather, it connoted a recognition of the human dignity which all human beings share in common. That was why both the hero of "Demons" and Raskolnikov and the Karamazov family received, at Dostoievsky's hands, such a stern arraignment and such harsh sentences. In short, above all things, Dostoievsky indicted those phenomena of Russian life which passionately he generalized under the one title "Anarchic Individualism"—that Individualism which sees nothing in life beyond itself and its own will, and thinks that everything ought to be made subservient to it, and that everything constitutes a means towards its own satisfaction and happiness. Happiness of that kind Dostoievsky abjured. To him life was a thing full of difficulties, an affair of por-

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tentous gravity, an achievement which it behoved every man and every woman to compass in proportion to his or her strength and abilities. And that, he said, could come about only through self-denial, or even through a certain asceticism; the first requisite for which was self-forgetfulness, and the second love of work, and the third self-victory. With energy greater still did he preach personal self-perfecting, the struggle with that "Karamazovism," that anarchism, which lurks in us all. Everything individual, personal, or arbitrary was wrong. Thus, of types, Dostoevsky's favourite was the type of the repentant transgressor; and so much was this the case that the title of "A Great Sinner" was designed to be prefixed to his novel "The Brothers Karamazov." Yet not of *oneself*, of one's own *faculties* and *abilities*, did he demand renunciation. Rather, he disliked and denounced personal will, all personal striving for happiness and satisfaction. Hence his ideal character of all was the Father Zosima of "The Brothers Karamazov"—a man who had sinned much,

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and had wasted his life, and had squandered his means, and had lifted his hand against his neighbour; but also a man who had suffered greatly through that same arrogance, through the fact that he had dared to oppose his interests to those of the community, and to look upon his personal dignity as superior to that of his neighbour; lastly, a man who had become saved through humility, and now stood divested of his *ego*, and disabused of the idea that that *ego* was anything special or exclusive or entitled to have "everything" fall to its lot. "Be there self-victory," said Dostoievsky, "and at once it will become possible, and even a bounden duty, to enter upon useful activity. And where, and wherein, shall that activity be found? In service of the people."

The same idea is to be seen repeated again and again in the "Diary." Constantly Dostoievsky calls upon every man to contribute "his mite" towards work for the people. Not a great work need a man concern himself to perform in that regard:

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all that he need do is to attempt some task *con amore*, and from his heart. "Not distribution of goods do we need, nor the giving away of one's coat; for all such acts savour of formality, and of the letter of the law. Rather, what we need, what is important, is that we should resolve to do all for the sake of love, to do all that lies in our power, to do all that we sincerely recognize to be possible. On the other hand, any undue endeavours to simplify ourselves will degenerate into mere masquerading and uncouthness, and do honour neither to ourselves nor to the people. For we are too complex to become simple: our education is such that we cannot ourselves become peasants. A better course is to strive to raise the peasant to our level. And we shall best do this by being sincere and unaffected of soul; for thereby we shall achieve far more than by striving to be unduly simple. And, should we deserve for our pains a reward, we shall find it in the people's love. True, the peasant may be stupid, he may be gross,

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he may be uncultured: yet how shall we say: 'Between us and him lies nothing in common'?"

Also Dostoievsky consistently set Russia in the front rank of nations, and always predicted for her a great and a lofty future. But wherein, according to him, lay a pledge of that great and lofty future? In Russian democracy, in a general and widespread recognition of the fact that "it is necessary to serve the people." Thus he says: "True, the democratic manifestations of the age may include much falseness and deceit, much journalistic chicanery, much tendency to impulsiveness; yet also there can be no doubt as to the genuineness, the disinterestedness, the frankness, the sincerity of the democratic instinct in the majority of the Russian public. In this connection we present, or are beginning to present, a phenomenon unknown in Europe, where democracy has just made its appearance, and is still fighting for its life against upper classes, which, though beaten in advance, are offering strenuous resistance;

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whereas in Russia we have never needed to conquer the upper classes, which of themselves have become democratic, or, more strictly speaking, pro-popular. That being then so—for who can deny it?—it remains that before us there lies an auspicious future; and though, at the present time, much still remains obscure, at least we may nourish a great and certain hope that the evil days through which Demos is passing will improve under the constant and tireless influence of such potent elements as the general democratic attitude now obtaining, and of that universal agreement among all classes of the Russian community, from the top downwards, which is to be seen in evidence.”

Of course, this contains much idealization: yet at least it is idealization of the better order. However, no matter what were Dostoievsky's views of the people, this much is certain: that he held popular service to constitute the chief, the most important, task in life of the educated classes. “The trend of most of Russian

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history has caused our populace to become so plunged in degradation, to endure such debauchment and ill-usage and rapine, that one wonders how the masses have contrived to retain their human semblance, let alone the smallest shred of beauty. Yet that beauty *has* remained, and he who loves humanity, and he whose heart can beat with sympathy for the sufferings of the masses, will understand, and will close his eyes to, the layer of mire and filth which overlays our populace, and will know how to discover therein diamonds. Consequently I repeat that the Russian masses ought not to be judged by the abominations which frequently they perpetrate, but by the many noble and radiant things which they produce amid their degradation. For the ideals of the people are clean, strong, and holy." This is true, for those ideals are the Christian ideals of self-denial, a desire to serve one's neighbour, and love of and sympathy for the unfortunate. Again, while in prison, Dostoievsky formed the idea that in every

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peasant, even though a criminal, there can be detected, not only a sense of truth, a soul, but also a consciousness of human dignity, an instinct for justice.

“The supreme, the most characteristic, feature of our people is its instinct, its hunger, for rectitude.” Again: “The convict knows that he is a convict, an outcast, and also he knows his position with regard to the authorities. Yet by no brands, by no fetters, can he be forced to forget that he is also a man. And since he is so truly a man, he ought to be treated as such. How sometimes humanity’s treatment of its kind dehumanizes a human being to the point of dulling in him the image of God! Those who are unfortunate should be treated the more humanely.” And how profoundly humane was Dostoievsky’s own attitude towards convicts! Not only does he pity them: he also sees in them the qualities of human beings, and acknowledges them to be possessors of human dignity. “What a wealth of young manhood here lies

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buried to no purpose! What a wealth of vigour lies annulled within these walls! Yet truly it may be said that once these same convicts were splendid men—perhaps the best, the most virile, the most gifted, of all whom we possess: whereas their powers and faculties lie ruined—they lie ruined abnormally, irrevocably, and illegally. Who is to blame for that? Yes, who is to blame? ”

In every human being there is a personality, a sense of dignity, a craving for happiness, a demand for justice. Crush down these things though you may, they will always reappear—spasmodically, perhaps, yet certainly. Recall, in this connection, Dostoievsky's reflections on the value of money in prison. Recall also the following profoundly penetrating passage:—

“ Sometimes even the authorities themselves would express surprise that, after conducting himself well, and even in exemplary fashion, for years, and being rewarded with promotion to the rank of *desiatotchni* or gangman, a given convict would suddenly,

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and for no apparent reason, but merely as though a devil had entered into his soul, begin to play the fool, and to indulge in vice, and to raise disturbances, and even to commit some such daring and heinous an offence as the manifestation of open disrespect for authority, or a murder, or a rape; so that all men would stare at him in astonishment. Yet of this unlooked-for outburst on the part of the very man from whom it might least have been expected the cause was always this. The outburst in question was a demonstration of the man's personality, of his individual, instinctive desire for self-expression, of his natural yearning to voice himself and his crushed individuality; which, suddenly exploding, ran to viciousness and to devilry and to a clouding of the reason and to frenzy and to mental convulsions; even as a man buried alive might awake, and beat upon the lid of his coffin, and strive to throw off the weight, even though his reason would tell him that his efforts were bound to prove unavailing. In the case of the

Dostoievsky

convict, however, the factor of reason would not enter into the matter at all. The phenomenon would constitute simply a spiritual spasm."

As I have said, there came a time when Dostoievsky's views of the people proved too "strong" for him. Gradually they assumed another, and a still more remarkable, tinge. That is to say, while ceasing to place in the forefront man's instinct for justice and his individual dignity, Dostoievsky took to preaching humility and the power to overcome the evil latent in man's inward nature. In other words, the later period in question saw Dostoievsky come to look upon the people as a great silent mass wherein lurked all truth and the power of deciding all questions with the help of love, faith, and an all-prevailing morality. Yes, he came to look upon the people as the sole repository of the wisdom of the heart, and as the basis of the future of Russia and of Europe. Consequently any attempt to alter the life of the people according to an individual programme or to a set of

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ideals derived from superior education he rated, not only as futile, but also as a sin, in that the people itself was the best judge of what was good for it, and therefore ought at all times to be consulted.

With what fury, indeed, did he charge "intellectual" reformers to remove their hands from his beloved people! What had such reformers to do with the matter? True, they had their learning, their ideals, and their aspirations, but the people had something more—it had *truth*. In the last issue of the "Diary" he says: "Let us listen to the Grey Smocks, and in the meanwhile stand aside and learn." At times, indeed, his denial of the right of the *Intelligentsia* to interfere with the life of the people assumed a yet more mordant and rancorous form, since his paradoxical and easily irritable nature was prone to run to extremes, and therefore could not brook restraint in this respect. To the end, therefore, he remained a *narodnik* or cultivator of the people, in that he looked upon the people as the chief, the most important,

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factor in Russian life, and believed that, without the people, nothing could be effected, nor any true life come to result, seeing that the people was the force predestined to effect a general transformation, and to decide all questions with the help of the one great principle of love—a principle evolved of suffering.

A return to the people, service of the masses in a spirit of Christian love and truth—such was Dostoievsky's message to the Russian *Intelligentsia*. In his view, every man who stood divorced from the popular element was bound to perish like a fish cast upon a river bank. The period which saw the first regeneration of Russia was the period when Pushkin initiated his movement of a *rapprochement* with the masses. "All that is truly beautiful in our literature has come of the masses, from Pushkin's creation of the humble, simple-minded type, Bielkin, onwards. Look at the purely popular songs of the present day: look at 'Oblomov' and Turgenev's 'A Nest of Gentlefolk.' True, those pro-

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ductions of Goucharov's and Turgenev's do not present the people proper; yet in them everything is lasting and beautiful, for the reason that, in writing them, their authors were brought into contact with the people, and gained thence an extraordinary measure of strength."

And to the Russian *Intelligentsia* of the present day, provided that it, too, comes into contact with, into association with, the people, and devotes its every faculty to the service of the people, there will accrue an equal measure of strength. And, in response thereto, the people will impart to that *Intelligentsia* its Christian ideals.

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